

THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

KRAFTWERK

148-PAGE
DELUXE
EDITION

ARCHIVE
INTERVIEWS

IN-DEPTH
NEW
REVIEWS

KRAFTWERK,
NEU! AND MÈ
BY MICHAEL
ROTHER

THE 20 BEST
KOSMISCHE
ALBUMS

THE MAN-MACHINE

KRAFTWERK:

THE FULL STORY

...RARITIES...SINGLES...EARLY PERSONNEL.....

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

"TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT US"

Five decades of adventure in music, art and robots

If there was a recent occasion to capture some of Kraftwerk's unique standing it was surely their run of 3-D Catalogue shows in 2013. There we stood, on the sloping floor of the Tate Modern Turbine Hall, delighting in the band's music – it was the placid, ominous *Radio-Activity* the night I went – but also in the band's many quirks and contradictions. It was an evening of past and present; high and popular art.

We could witness Kraftwerk's dedication to technology (their engrossing visuals) but also smile at the kitsch retro-futurism that permitted it (the cardboard 3-D glasses, unchanged since the 1950s). We could hear the songs we knew; but now with optimal updates installed. Most obviously, while the band remained utterly serene and remote, the music and experience conspired to connect and enfold us all.

That night, and throughout that week, Kraftwerk revisited their official canon, as they presented it in their 2009 box, *The Catalogue*, an eight-album run of highly polished, high-concept work beginning with 1974's *Autobahn*. In this magazine, you'll find in-depth reviews of those LPs, and a wealth of contemporary encounters with the band, drawn from the archives of *NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Uncut*.

Everything outside these self-imposed restrictions, Ralf Hütter has pronounced, is "archaeology". But every machine has a prototype – and Kraftwerk are no different. As such, this publication isn't only a celebration of

Kraftwerk's 50 years of creativity, it also gets into the circuitry of their

story. Here you'll be able to discover more about the period prior to Kraftwerk's main canon: the two "cone" albums, *Ralf And Florian*, and even the album by Organisation, the experimental Düsseldorf band that featured a young Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider.

As you'll read in the early pages here, and in our reminiscence from Florian and Ralf's early collaborator Eberhard Kranemann, anyone who imagines Kraftwerk to have always been about clean lines, control and laboratory conditions will be in for a surprise: the dawn of Kraftwerk was a rather more random place. Still, somewhere amid the naked swimming, the auto-destructive art, guitars and cross-legged hippies, however, a scientific breakthrough was made.

WORKING thereafter in their Kling Klang studio, Ralf and Florian created a hermetic unit ("like a married couple", Kranemann notes), dedicated to their music and to a – highly European – vision of interconnectivity and its implications. While some writers welcomed the new music – initially as another turn on prog's winding track – and responded to Kraftwerk for their advances in aesthetics, music and humour, there was in some quarters a suspicion manifesting itself in an exaggerated, yobbish ignorance. If there was a coherent

complaint to be discerned in the latter position, it was that the music was "cold" and lacking "humanity".

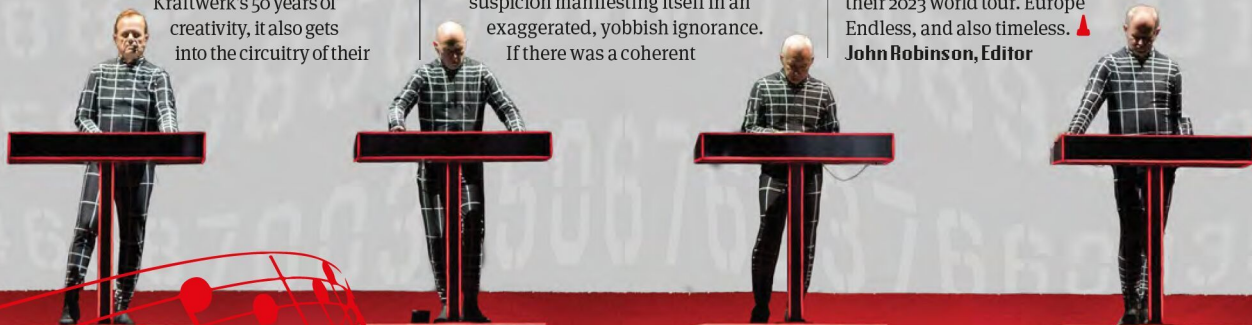
Which is a little ironic. Because as much as it is about technology, it's worth remembering that Kraftwerk's music is about technology's consequences for human beings. That could mean weighing data-gathering against individual freedom, or pondering social connection via remote computers. On a practical level, even into middle age the band were interested in the effects electronic music had on actual people – taking regular

trips into the world's evolving clublands to take the temperature of the room.

In recent years, coincident with their old/new release *The Mix*, in which the band reworked some of their best-known songs for a younger audience – or at least one more familiar with club music – Kraftwerk has predominantly been a performing rather than a recording unit.

Since this magazine was last published, we have mourned the passing of Kraftwerk founder member Florian Schneider-Esleben, emerged from the pandemic which interrupted the band's 50th-anniversary celebrations, and now can continue to enjoy their legacy as the band prepare to embark on their 2023 world tour. Europe Endless, and also timeless. ▲
John Robinson, Editor

THE BAND WERE
INTERESTED IN
THE EFFECTS
ELECTRONIC
MUSIC HAD ON
ACTUAL PEOPLE



ROB WATKINS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Mountain Stage
at the Green Man
festival in Wales,
August 18, 2022



Plinth-pop: the post-Florian Schneider lineup in Paris, November 2014



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01_TONE FLOAT

THE FREE-ASSOCIATING DÜSSELDORF SCENE GIVES RISE TO THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF A KEYBOARD/ FLUTE DUO (AND THEIR JAZZ-ROCK FRIENDS). BY NICK HASTED

RELEASED: JANUARY, 1970

WEST Germany was waking up in 1969, after a deep but troubled sleep. Following the shifty optimism of the '40s "rubble" movies and the Economic Miracle's cash anaesthetic, the post-war generation had come of age wanting more than silence in response to Nazism. The terrorist spasm of the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof Gang) was one youthful rejection of a nightmare past. But for the founders of what might best be called Deutsch Rock, this was also an optimistic time. Though some artists, like Werner Herzog, would make peace with great pre-Nazi work (the point of his later *Nosferatu* remake), for young people with ideas, few slates had been culturally cleaner. "We didn't have to reject anything," Ralf Hütter soon realised, as he and his friends stepped over the prone, discredited past. "It was an empty space. And that same feeling was everywhere. The different artforms, literature, film and painting, were blossoming everywhere in Germany in the late '60s." In the coming years, they would morally and musically rebuild the right to be German.

For architecture student and keyboardist Hütter and his new friend, flautist Florian Schneider-Esleben (soon simply Schneider), who he had met on a jazz improv course, this pioneering path would be plotted together. "When we first met, we talked the same language," Hütter told journalist Simon Witter. "We were two *Einzelgänger* [mavericks], Mr Kling and Mr Klang.

Two *Einzelgänger* produce a *Doppelgänger*."

Whether necking acid at a Stockhausen concert or attempting to jam with Jimmy Smith, as they roamed the youth clubs, art galleries and sometimes strip clubs that constituted their Düsseldorf scene, a crucial bond that would last most of their lives now began. Having both studied classical music, with Hütter also topping up his Hammond chops at a jazz-friendly conservatoire, they processed clues to future music, from Beethoven to Pink Floyd, and wandered through amorphous lineups, putting on back-projected, multi-media shows. In a city whose cultural avatar was Fluxus performance artist Joseph Beuys, and with a gallery-based music milieu, visuals mattered. By the end of the '60s they were rehearsing regularly in courtyard rooms between Frankfurt's main train station and a brothel.

In decentralised West Germany, even nearby scenes were unknown to each other, as the disparate likes of Munich's communal rockers Amon Düül and Hamburg's Faust operated in unknowing parallel. In what Hütter later dubbed the Ruhr scene, though, Kraftwerk's future core regularly ran into a band from Cologne who, with their debut album *Monster Movie* (1968), were at this time a step ahead of them. "We were like the art-scene band, always on the same bill as Can,"

Hütter fondly told *Uncut*. In one jam at a gallery party, Hütter and Schneider, along with Can's Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebeckzeit, formed a rollicking proto-supergroup. Far from Kraftwerk's increasingly icy precision, this was a freeform phase, with absolutely everything in flux.

Instrumentally, 1969 found Schneider focusing on a dizzying variety of electronic flutes, as well as an electronic violin played with Arabic scales, while Hütter experimented with his Hammond.

"He did without the harmonic percussion and vibrato effects," bassist Eberhard Kranemann said of the latter. "Blue notes and syncopation from American jazz, soul and rhythm and blues music all got chucked into the bin. That resulted in a neutral sound pattern more like... modern classical music, as for example, in György Ligeti." Among their multiple lineups at the time, the one that stabilised around Basil Hammoudi, Butch Hauf and Fred Monicks' rhythm instruments and percussion was essentially a jazz-rock band, constrained by touches of conceptual, art-

scene reserve. Hütter and Schneider reputedly wanted to call them Kraftwerk only to be thwarted by the London branch of RCA, who signed them and wanted an Anglophone name. So it was Organisation who went into the studio with Conny Plank, and kept most clues of what was to come out of sight.

**TONE FLOAT FELL
BETWEEN THE
CRACKS OF THE
PROGRESSIVE
UNDERGROUND
IN THE UK**



SIDE One of *Tone Float* comprises its 20-minute title track, a slowly building ceremonial invocation with African-style percussion, the influence of American rock and jazz by no means expunged in music that isn't Deutsch alone just yet. Hütter and Schneider's bracingly abrasive duels of Hammond and flute are a provoking glimpse of the electro-masterminds as pure jazz players, trained in and relishing improv fire. At one point they hit a long, even groove that might with hindsight be dubbed motorik, but is really just the band, and Hütter in particular, laying back in mesmeric reverie until Schneider's Eastern-sounding flute snakes in. Psychedelic dislocation is certainly possible as the piece progresses. But rather than the frictionless glide Kraftwerk would perfect, this music still, stubbornly, swings.

Pushed to its climax by Monicks' clamouring drum-rolls, and primeval cries from Schneider's electronic flute, "Tone Float" finds a young band from a Central European backwater proving themselves fully cognisant of jazz, rock and classical trends, and ready to take their place on a bill with Soft Machine or Pink Floyd. Only a coolness from its future Kraftwerk members, perhaps attributable to conservatoire training, conceivably indicates Bundesrepublik roots, or coming man-machine evolution.

Side Two begins with Schneider's asthmatically

wheezing, attacking electric flute and Hütter's Hammond vamps on "Milk Rock", while "Rhythm Salad" lives up to its name, as Organisation's many percussive moving parts collide with rapid skill. The seasick pitch and roll of Schneider's electric violin faintly suggests the Velvet's John Cale during the climactic, acid-struck "Noitasinagro", as the organ does Ray Manzarek on The Doors' "The End". In 1969 Jim Morrison and Ralf Hütter, remarkably, were rock contemporaries.

Released in the UK with English song titles, *Tone Float* fell between the cracks of the progressive underground there and Germany, where it had to be imported. Organisation were dropped, then split, as parental pressure sent

Hütter scurrying back to architecture studies in Aachen. The back sleeve, at least, confirms some continuity between this apparent dead-end and the more stable situation Kraftwerk found a few months later: it shows the band's iconic traffic cones already in place. Though they're a long way from turning on to it, signs to the Autobahn are beginning to appear. 🚧

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...TONE FLOAT, TONE FLOAT, TONE FLOAT, TONE FLOAT,.....

1. *Tone Float* ****
2. *Milk Rock* ***
3. *Silver Forest* ***
4. *Rhythm Salad* ***
6. *Noitasinagro* ****

LABEL: RCA Victor
PRODUCED BY: Conny Plank and Organisation

RECORDED AT: Rhenus Studios, Cologne
PERSONNEL: Basil Hammoudi (glockenspiel, conga gong, musical box, bongos, percussion, vocals), Butch Hauf (bass, shaky tube, small bells, plastic hammer, percussion), Ralf Hütter (Hammond organ).

Fred Monicks (drums, bongos, maracas, cowbell, tambourine, percussion), Florian Schneider-Esleben (electric flute, alto flute, bell, triangle, tambourine, electro-violin, percussion)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK - ; US -

02_KRAFTWERK

MOTORIK AND KOSMISCHE COLLIDE AS THE MAN-MACHINES FIND THEIR FEET, CONFRONTING DARK PASTS IN SEARCH OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE. BY JASON ANDERSON

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 1970

LIKE all of the recordings by Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider in the five years between *Tone Float*, the sole album by the Kraftwerk precursor Organisation, and the first flourishing of their creative vision with *Autobahn* in 1974, Kraftwerk's eponymous debut is filled with tantalising flashes of the genius to come. With its startling use of electronic elements and all the rich evidence of the duo's eagerness to experiment with new sound forms, *Kraftwerk* is distinguished by a boldness and occasional brilliance that belie its reputation as an early draft whose authors would prefer to keep out of circulation.

And as much as the album's contents may signal where they were going, it's just as suggestive about where else they might have gone. The four instrumental tracks here – which range in style and tone from the wildly turbulent and proto-Neu! grooves of “Ruckzuck” and “Stratovarius” to the more placid machine music of “Megaherz” to “Vom Himmer Hoch”, a nightmarish evocation of an aerial bombing – present a variety of alternate Kraftwerks besides the one Hütter and Schneider ultimately perfected.

The identity here is very much in flux, and rather intentionally so. Like so many debut

albums, *Kraftwerk* presents a band that's preoccupied with the task of absorbing and processing the influences filling their impressionable minds. In the case of these two students of Düsseldorf's Academy Of Art, their avant-garde musical inspirations (eg, Pierre Henry's musique concrète, or the pioneering forays into electroacoustic composition and electronic abstraction by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Morton Subotnick) were arguably less significant in the long run than the ones they discovered in the realms of visual and conceptual art. That results like “Ruckzuck” and “Megaherz” include traits soon to be regarded as trademarks of krautrock – the relentless drive of the motorik pulse, the exploratory ways of the kosmische – almost seems accidental given how much they were pulling away from their peers and from the freer, woollier ways of Organisation.

That's why it's so unfortunate that the Kraftwerk braintrust has steadfastly denied this debut – along with all the early works that

Schneider has dismissed as mere “archaeology” – the respect that other artists casually granted far more dubious examples of juvenilia. Then again, you have to suspect that their reticence may have something to do with that bongo player.

Colourfully clad in quasi-Moroccan garb with his eyes closed and mouth agape as he ecstatically pounds away on his skins, percussionist Basl Hammoudi is the standout performer (for better and worse) in the only known clip of Organisation in action, jamming away on an early version of “Ruckzuck” at what proved to be the band's final performance at the Pop & Blues Festival in Essen in April of 1970.

Such an unabashed display of full-fledged hippie freakitude couldn't be more diametrically opposed to the perfectly composed and controlled sound and image of the creative unit that emerged down the motorway. But Hütter and Schneider needn't feel so mortified about this particular relic, or the embryonic period it represents. For one thing, they're hardly visible in the footage, the camera operators being so

**KRAFTWERK'S
EPONYMOUS
DEBUT IS FILLED
WITH TANTALISING
FLASHES OF THE
GENIUS TO COME**



entranced by Organisation's other players that Schneider and his flute are shown only fleetingly and Hütter's presence is conveyed solely by his fingers on a keyboard. For another, "Ruckzuck" rates as a major achievement even in this relatively freewheeling version. When recorded a few months later with Conny Plank, it became the first fully realised demonstration of the new band's burgeoning interest in electronic music and aptitude for studio-based experimentation.

As such, "Ruckzuck" was one of several key developments in Kraftwerk's early existence. Arguably the most important was the decision to establish this new band first and foremost as a vehicle for Hütter and Schneider. Whatever the contributions of the many others in their orbit – a key player being lyricist Emil Schult – this core duo would serve as Kraftwerk's chief conceptualists and sole credited musical composers until Karl Bartos's contributions to *The Man-Machine* in 1978.

THE advantages of operating as a twosome was something they gleaned from an exhibition by Gilbert & George in Düsseldorf's Kunsthalle in 1970. Hütter and Schneider were also evidently struck by the British art team's suit-and-tie appearance and occasional presentation of themselves as quasi-robotic "living sculptures". Among the list of commandments in Gilbert & George's first manifesto – as published by the art journal *Studio International* in 1970 – were two the new Kraftwerk clearly took to heart: "Always be smartly dressed, well groomed, relaxed, friendly, polite and in complete control"; and "Make the world believe in you and to pay heavily for this privilege."

To make art out of everyday life was another key concept. Needing a space to do so, Hütter and Schneider rented an empty workshop in a '50s-era building at Mintropstrasse 16 in an industrial area near Düsseldorf's railway station. Though it would not gain its name as Kling Klang until 1973, this workspace nevertheless became the hive for Hütter and Schneider's creative endeavours.

This practicality extended to the band's choice of name. Though it was a term used for power stations in Germany, it was also meant to encompass the additional meanings of

"kraft" (power but also energy and dynamics) and "werk" ("work" both as in labour and an artist's oeuvre). Like the decision to convert a lowly industrial space into their more modest version of Andy Warhol's Factory, the very name of Kraftwerk served an overriding concept that dissolved any conventional boundaries between matters of artistic creation, systems of mass production and the mundanities of everyday life. Hütter made a further nod to Warhol and pop art with the traffic cone logo he designed for the covers of *Kraftwerk* and its 1972 successor.

All this made for a remarkable abundance of ideas when work began at the new studio on their second collaboration with Plank, which took place in July and August of 1970. Dropped by RCA owing to *Tone Float*'s minuscule sales, Hütter and Schneider landed a deal with Philips, a new label backed by Phonogram whose other signings included Hamburg prog-rockers Frumpy. Plank remained an enthusiastic supporter and co-worker despite (or possibly because of) a

methodology that was dominated more by lengthy discussions than putting sounds on tape. Though he was already much in demand

and far better known than his charges, Plank agreed to share producing credits with Hütter and Schneider, who are also the only credited musicians besides the two drummers. The two songs on Side One feature Andreas Hohmann, later a member of Ibliss, a multi-percussionist progressive band that also featured Hammoudi and whose sole album was produced by Plank. Soon to be a driving force in krautrock alongside Michael Rother in Neu! – and Kraftwerk for the brief spell when Hütter returned to his architecture studies in

1971 – Klaus Dinger began his time in the band by playing on "Vom Himmel Hoch".

Despite the presence of these ringers, Hütter later admitted they had difficulty finding drummers who could (or would) abide their unorthodox approach to recording. As he later explained to *Electronic & Music Maker* magazine, "Not only were we interested in musique concrète but also in playing organ tone clusters and flute feedback sounds that added variety to the repeated note sequences that we recorded and mixed. Then we used several acoustic drummers as we turned our attention to more rhythmic music and soon found that amplifying drums with contact mics was desirable for us but not readily accepted by the players."

Schneider's eagerness to manipulate the sound of his primary instrument also became more pronounced. A friend who'd previously played with him in the experimental group PISSOFF, Eberhard Kranemann shared this description in Rudi Esch's Düsseldorf scene history, *Electri-City*: "Florian hooked up echo machines with different echo rates between the electronic module on the flute and the amplifier, creating waves and waves of overlapping flute sounds with various times and rhythms." Kranemann considered these electronic modifications an important transitional step before the duo could "put aside the instruments altogether

and just make purely electronic music".

For the time being, the approach was more accurately described as electroacoustic. Nevertheless, Kraftwerk's direction was startlingly clear within the first moments of "Ruckzuck", which bears a striking resemblance to the opening of "Autobahn" albeit with Schneider's treated, multi-tracked flute in place of the later song's gently ascending synthesiser tones. Schneider's flute cluster becomes one recurring element in an arrangement whose unusual grace and precision demonstrate Plank's mastery of spatial dynamics.

TO MAKE ART
OUT OF EVERYDAY
LIFE WAS
ANOTHER KEY
CONCEPT FOR
KRAFTWERK





Kraftwerk invent techno 20 years early during a televised mixed-media show, Soest, Germany, November 1970



Florian Schneider at Soest, 1970, and (above) his equipment



Hohmann's beats give the song a muscularity, too.

But expectations that the song will become an early demonstration of Kraftwerk's forte for momentum and velocity are confounded three minutes in. That's when – as Julian Cope put it in *Krautrocksampler*, “this great motorik groove becomes a horrid rhythmless noise”. The next few minutes are filled with disorienting phasing effects, discordant keyboards and ominous whooshes and scrapings. Gradually, Schneider's flute and Hohmann's drums retake their positions as primary focal points but any sense of stability has been fatally compromised. The accelerating tempo emphasises the air of unpredictability, as does the five-second-long false ending before “Ruckzuck” culminates in one last burst of speed. What begins as an exploration of early kosmische textures in the vein of Tangerine Dream's *Electronic Meditation* ends in an almost thuggish display of aggression. Not for nothing did Cope liken “Ruckzuck” to early Van Der Graaf Generator. (Elsewhere in his pioneering primer on German experimental rock, Cope favourably and accurately compares Kraftwerk to Neu!, Soft Machine, the Stooges and the Muppets.)

APPROPRIATELY enough for a song whose name merges that of the iconic violin maker with an atmospheric reference, “Stratovarius” opens as an ominous cloud of electronic noise, effects-heavy violin and flute, and low, distorted organ tones. While there's no synth here, the eerie machine-age racket of Morton Subotnick's *Silver Apples Of The Moon* is still an apt reference point. Again, there's an abrupt shift after three minutes – this time it sounds as if the instruments have all been tossed down the stairs into a dank sub-basement. After gathering up the debris, the musicians then somehow pummel out an acid-rock jam. Very nearly funky, the final minutes of “Stratovarius” bear a kinship with Can's “Mother Sky” (also recorded that summer) and the later Neu! masterpiece

RALF'S VERDICT

“This name, krautrock – it's coming from some idiots, I don't know who, but it was never used in those times. The music was called Deutsch Rock, or electrorock, underground music, free rock.”
RALF HÜTTER, UNCUT 2009

“Halogallo” even if the would-be motorik groove suffers more indignities. After the drums drop out and creepy insectoid sounds claim the foreground, they return for a final round of bludgeoning worthy of Iron Butterfly.

Relative to the assault of Side One, “Megahertz” is bound to seem more serene, even if the rumbles and oscillations in the album's one

drummer-less song suggest that the previous tenants of Kraftwerk's studio had left some machinery running. (Perhaps it's meant to be the generator in the album's gatefold image.) Though the bending of pitches and other effects can be disorienting, the song's more placid qualities ultimately predominate. With its warmer woodwind sounds and tinkling of bells, it shares a quality of proto-ambient calm with Popul Vuh's *Affenstunde* while still pointing toward the chilly serenity of “Metropolis” and “Neon Lights” on *The Man-Machine*.

As weird as *Kraftwerk* has been up to this point, there's still no preparing for “Vom Himmel Hoch”, the album's most adventurous song and possibly the most shocking of their early works thanks to its explicit referencing of the wartime devastation their nation both inflicted and suffered. The title is another grim bit of wordplay, associating a popular children's song (“From Heaven Above”) with the track's aural simulation of a

bombing raid. Changes in frequency and modulation transform the various musical sources into sirens, approaching airplanes and falling bombs. Providing a kind of unholy pounding, Dinger gradually gives this doomy soundscape a more identifiable musical shape. But the unnerving tempo acceleration is another sign of inherent instability – sure enough, the song suddenly devolves into squelchy formlessness before ending in an apocalyptic blast.

Just as *Kraftwerk* began with a fleeting suggestion of the song that became the band's commercial and creative breakthrough, it concludes with another track that anticipates “Autobahn” in its use of a quasi-narrative structure and its canny merging of form and concept. The key difference is that in place of the later song's techno-utopian ethos is a bleak, terrifying evocation of the destructive capabilities of machines and the men who make and direct them.

Rarely – if ever – would Hütter and Schneider again acknowledge the horrors of the recent past in their work. They would instead direct their eyes forward, and find a gleaming future. ☸

SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTEKRAFTWERK, KRAFTWERK, KRAFTWERK, KRAFTWERK.....

1. Ruckzuck *****
2. Stratovarius *****
3. Megahertz *****
4. Vom Himmel Hoch *****

LABEL: Philips
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider, Conny Plank
RECORDED AT: Kraftwerk Studio, Düsseldorf
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (organ, guitar, tubon), Florian Schneider-

Esleben (flute, violin, percussion), Andreas Hohmann (drums, “Ruckzuck” and “Stratovarius”), Klaus Dinger (drums, “Vom Himmel Hoch”)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
US -; UK -

"WE STARTED SLOW, BUT WE ALWAYS WENT WILD"

Kosmische guitar hero **MICHAEL ROTHER** reveals the whole story of his epochal band NEU! – a tale involving Kraftwerk, 1,000 acid trips, remote communes, David Bowie and Rother's late, wayward bandmate, Klaus Dinger. "Creating beauty out of pain, that's the story," Rother tells **TOM PINNOCK**.



UNCUT MARCH 2019



IF you had walked the streets of Düsseldorf in 1972, through the city's entertainment district, you might have heard Neu!'s "Hallogallo" coming out of the doorways of the clubs.

A few years later, though, Neu! was gone, disappeared. People moved on, punk arrived.

Because we were not a band, Klaus Dinger and I, we considered Neu! more a project, not a group. Whenever Klaus and I made music together it was Neu!. That's how we understood our situation. There weren't any other musicians that had the same ideas about music. Looking back, of course, that makes sense, because we were trying to be different.

Thurston Moore told me a few years ago: "We always come back to 'Hallogallo'..." I remember being in a rented studio in Hamburg, with our brilliant producer Conny Plank, recording that song. We didn't write beforehand – Klaus and I

just got together in the studio and created music. With "Hallogallo", we recorded Klaus's drums and my rhythm guitar, and then I got this amazing feedback on the guitar, which enabled me to do these long, syrupy notes. We were so lucky to work with Conny – at one point he turned around the tape, I heard everything backwards and thought, 'Ah, this is wonderful!' He made me play to the backwards sound, then turned it round again, so the new guitar was backwards. The finished recording sounds frail, as if you could take one element away and the whole thing could collapse.

Playing with Klaus was thrilling. He was so strange and so difficult, on his own planet – but he was also this time machine, this amazing drummer who just played and played and played. Creating beauty out of pain, that's the story. We started slow, but we always went wild.

It was pure chance that I ended up in the Kraftwerk studio. At that time I was working as a conscientious objector at this psychiatric hospital in Neuss, near Düsseldorf. One day I went on a demo and this other guy,

also a conscientious objector and a guitar player, said he had an invitation to go to a studio and do some music for a film. "Would you like to come along?"

I thought the band name sounded stupid, and I considered going home to my girlfriend, but I decided to join him, and that changed everything. Jamming with Ralf Hütter, I suddenly didn't feel alone any more. I was not interested in sounding like any of the British or American

bands I loved, but I was equally not interested in sounding like anything else from Germany. We would often improvise in my band Spirits Of Sound, but it was a dead end – I needed some expression of my own identity. But playing

"KLAUS WOULD IGNORE OPEN DOORS AND JUST RUN THROUGH THE WALL"
MICHAEL ROTHER

Michael Rother live
in Germany, 1971





with Ralf I realised, 'OK, this is possible, it's something without blues...'

We improvised, threw melodies around, and this drummer, Klaus Dinger, and Florian Schneider were listening. A few days later, Florian called and invited me to join Kraftwerk. Because I was so happy at this improvised music session, I left Spirits Of Sound behind. I have a slightly guilty conscience, as the band broke up then, but it was necessary for me to move on. The confusion in my head was my problem; my personal struggle to find my own musical path.

I joined Kraftwerk in February and stayed for four or five months. So much happened. We played on TV, on *Beat-Club*. But there was no audience and no feeling of excitement – it was like playing somewhere in orbit, very artificial. We went into the studio with Conny Plank and tried to record Kraftwerk's second album, but when we failed it was clear it was the end of the road for this collaboration. Klaus and Florian were always having these strange fights. Klaus was already quite impressive on the drums in rehearsal, but on stage he finally reached the kind of intense performance he was capable of.

He threw in all his willpower and energy. Once, on stage, he smashed his hand onto one of his jagged, broken cymbals, but he didn't stop. I could never have reacted in that way, but Klaus was different, and this impressed the audience. His determination to ignore open doors and just run through the wall... that was Klaus Dinger.

When we left Kraftwerk, Klaus and I began to make music together. We didn't have much money, so we booked a few nights in a studio with Conny and created the music on the spot. We had some ideas in our minds, but we didn't talk about things before we went into the studio. Really, the music came together while we were doing the overdubs. Klaus and I tried to help Conny mix the stuff, but he was the guy in control. He memorised the good parts of the overdubs – I don't know how he did it. "OK, I remember guitar

four was great at 2:31, and then rubbish at 2:50..."

I was totally focused on myself at that time. We played with Can once, but I didn't make contact with those guys. It was my decision to figure out where

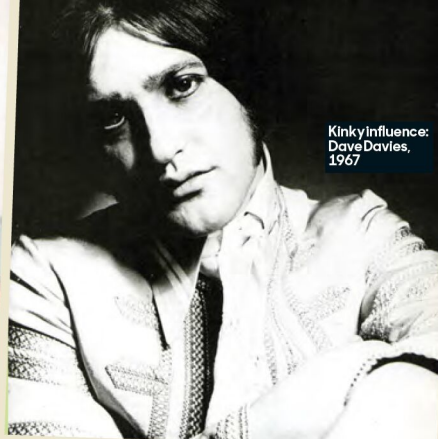
I was heading, and not mingle too much with other bands. I

remember once listening to a transmission of a Tangerine Dream concert in 1974, and I thought, 'No, no, no...'

I was not impressed by Amon Düül either. I thought they still had too much blues and American influences. It sounds so arrogant now, but it all makes sense if you understand that it was necessary. Back then I was still trying to figure out the next step, I was still assembling the blocks of the music.

NEU!'S first album sold over 30,000 copies, 10,000 of which went to the UK, and a few thousand to America. People liked it. Naturally Klaus and I thought of playing live





Kinky influence:
Dave Davies,
1967

.....SUPER '60S ROTHER RECALLS HIS FORMATIVE INFLUENCES...

IN the early '60s, you didn't hear any music for youth on German radio. There was only *schlager*, or folk music on TV. Then through Radio Caroline and Luxembourg, I got in touch with The Beatles, The Kinks, the Stones. Even today I get goosebumps if I hear "You Really Got Me". In the beginning I was struggling on guitar, because I was just trying to sound as much as possible like George Harrison or Dave Davies or Keith Richards or Hank Marvin. But things changed in the mid-'60s – suddenly you had Cream, stuff that impressed us a lot. And then Jimi Hendrix, and the way he left the normal boundaries of guitar playing and what you expected of a musician by using the whole studio as an instrument. This was where things started changing dramatically in my mind. I saw Hendrix live in 1968, but he was not great in that concert. It was a hall for classical music, the sound was so poor, the bass player had a small amp and Jimi had just one guitar. But on stage he was a really sympathetic figure and I became a huge fan."

"IT WAS ALMOST
SCIENTIFIC
CURIOSITY THAT
MADE ME TAKE
THE TRIP"
MICHAEL ROTHER

when the first album came out, but we didn't know any musicians who were on the same path. It was very difficult, so first we tried performing as a duo, but it was destined to be a failure with just one guitar and drums. I played back recordings of bowed bass or some watery sounds on my little mono cassette recorder, but people were puzzled – in 1972, this was not considered playing live.

There were two musicians we tried to incorporate: it was interesting with Eberhard Kranemann, but it was so completely different from what I had in mind. Eberhard played on this pedal steel, deconstructing the music, but it didn't work for me. The other one was the bass player of Guru Guru, Uli Trepte; he was a very nice and interesting person, but when it came to bass playing he was on a totally different rhythmic path. He played bass as if he were on a sofa, really laying back, and we wanted to rush forward.

We played between five and seven concerts in '72, then gave up and recorded our second album, again in a few days. But at the last concert in Düsseldorf in the autumn, we played for the German Chancellor Willy Brandt. I was a huge fan of him and his idea of reconciliation with the east. He promised change, promised to move away from traditional, very conservative post-war politics. A guy from United Artists came over to this concert, and he had this idea to take Neu! to the UK for a tour. So I really had to find a new solution. I'm not sure if I even discussed this with Klaus, but I remember hearing the second Cluster album, and the track "Im Süden", and just the idea of those four notes on the guitar gave me hope that a collaboration with them could work.

I visited the two guys in Forst with my guitar, and suddenly another door opened. Just playing with Hans-Joachim Roedelius, on his electric piano with some delay, I knew this was something I had to follow. When Dieter Moebius then joined us it was clear that this was where I wanted to go. Full of enthusiasm, the three of us recorded for months in 1973, creating material that was then released on Harmonia's first album, *Musik Von Harmonia*, in January 1974.

Klaus was very unhappy when I decided to leave Düsseldorf and move to Forst to live with Cluster, so he tried to convince Roedelius, Moebius and I to throw all our forces together with him. But at that time Klaus was already becoming a difficult person. He was so strong-headed right from the beginning. It was amazing to work on music with him, but on a personal level he wasn't among my friends. The whole gang at Forst thought he was a person they didn't want around. He later boasted about having taken over 1,000 LSD trips, and claimed in the '90s, "My LSD ratio against Rother is 1,000 to zero!" But, because I was fascinated by psychology, everything that could explain the brain or the way people function, I had taken one LSD trip in 1970 when I was working at the mental institution, where I met a lot of young people who had some psychosis due to drugs. Strangely it was a doctor who gave it to me, and he got it from California, so it was the best stuff! It was not a habit for me, it was almost scientific curiosity that made me take the trip.

Klaus and I decided to record a third album, though – our contract was for three albums, but the main reason was that some of the ideas I was coming up



Acid test, Dinger vs Rother: "My LSD ratio against Rother is 1000 to zero..."

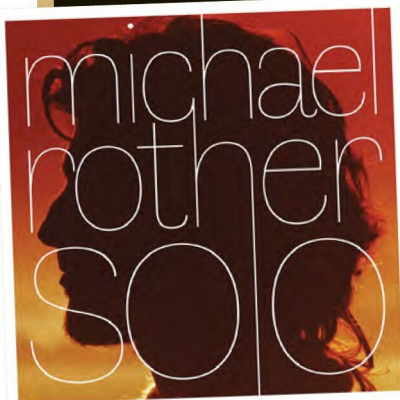
with were better suited for Neu! than Harmonia, I thought. By this time Conny Plank had started his own recording studio and he was willing to give us much more time, so we had two weeks to record *Neu!* 75.

Klaus wanted to move away from the drums, that was his big desire, he wanted to be right in the front of the stage and to get feedback from the people. So we agreed to split the time in the studio, with half the album recorded as a quartet with the two drummers, Thomas Dinger and Hans Lampe, and the other half as a duo.

"Hero" is such an impressive example of the qualities of Klaus. I remember clearly sitting with Conny Plank in the mixing room listening to Klaus next door belting away. Conny and I looked at each other and were just totally blown away. But Klaus wanted to improve it, he wanted to do a second recording that was more structured, but we convinced him to use the first version. It's just amazing – even today when I listen to "Hero", I get goosebumps. We combined the elements, so it's wrong to think Side One is Rother and Side Two is Dinger. We didn't see it that way. You can't take away my guitars from "Hero", and neither can you take away Klaus' drums or his inputs to tracks on the first side like "Isi" or "Seeland". David Bowie might have heard "Hero", because a few years later I was asked to play on the album I think became "*Heroes*". But it never happened – I believe someone wanted to prevent David from making a mistake. Because his sales were going down, and some people were not happy with the music, it makes sense that his management or label might say, "David is so enthusiastic about these [*krautrock*] idiots – maybe we should stop that." So they told me he'd changed his mind, but it seems he was told

.....FORST MAJEURE
MR ON HIS LATE-'70S
WORK, COLLECTED
IN THE 2019 SOLO
BOXSET.....

I DIDN'T want to be a solo artist, it was just the fact that Roedelius and Moebius lost hope in Harmonia. The band was an economic disaster, with no positive feedback. In spring '76 they told me they didn't want to continue, and I found myself alone. But I cannot really explain why *Flammende Herzen* became a success and Harmonia didn't – in my heart, it was just the same. On my first four solo albums, Jaki Liebezeit did incredible stuff on the drums. He just picked up all these vibrations, all these emotions, and played all the right things. I asked him for a certain steady motorik beat, but all the patterns and the accents, where one thing leads to another part, he did it all in an intuitive, perfect way. The same journalist who brought Brian Eno to Harmonia's concert in '74 had a radio show, and he played the whole album when I was a guest. This opened the door. I remember sitting with him after the show in the studio, and the phone kept on ringing, people calling in asking for information. I didn't know what it meant, but he said, 'Michael, watch out... I know what this means.' And that's how things suddenly took off."



Rother: "I didn't want to be a solo artist..."

I'd changed my mind. There were recordings on the first LP from a boat trip Klaus had taken with his girlfriend. She was from Norway, her parents decided to move back and they took her with them. Klaus was heartbroken. He was still singing about this girl on *Neu!* 75, on "Hero". It went on for years. I think he cultivated this loss, even to the end, as some source of creation. I also had my heartbreaks, but we had a different way of presenting them to the public.

There's only one short video clip in existence of Neu! playing live, from near the end. You see Klaus Dinger on guitar, playing the frontman, doing the Pete Townshend moves. You see the two drummers beating the drums as if the devil was whipping them. And then I was at the back, with two Revox tape machines running these huge loops; the camera goes to me and you can see that I was totally unhappy. This was not the music I wanted to make.

HARMONIA for me was a very valuable step. Being in the countryside in Forst was an experience of

liberty, very different from what I knew of being a tenant in a flat in Düsseldorf.

The police were very sceptical about us. 'Is this a sex commune? Drugs? Are they maybe nutcases? Are they going to do the Manson thing?' There was even a police raid on Forst. Back then the police were trying to catch the Baader-Meinhof members, so there were roadblocks everywhere, police searching cars and making people show their IDs. We were in our Mercedes in Brussels in '74, and suddenly there were all these policemen with machine guns standing around us – they thought, 'OK, maybe we have these people!' It was a bit scary.

Nowadays people have got so used to others looking a bit different, but back then, the 95 per cent of the population who didn't have long hair thought the other five per cent were into terrorism, drugs, sex, abuse and whatever. It took years until the neighbourhood warmed to us, and they realised that we were just musicians, more or less. It was not exactly a bourgeois lifestyle, but we were not terrorists or dealers.

In 1977, after Harmonia had split and my first solo album, *Flammende Herzen*, came out, it was the Deutsche Herbst, the 'German Autumn', when there were a lot of assassinations of politicians and more. Radio stations would often play my instrumentals to calm people down before the bad news came on. It was very strange. I'm not a cynic, but I was benefitting from these events, because the music was suddenly on the air all the time.

That year, Klaus and I did a radio show together, for NDR in Hamburg. They played "*Flammende Herzen*", and I remember him sitting there and saying, "Hmmm. Yeah. Good." He seemed quite impressed. Klaus sold even more albums with *La Düsseldorf* than I did with my solo work!

In 1985 we decided to give it another try and see whether we could come up with something. So we started out in a small studio in Düsseldorf, a rental studio. Klaus was becoming very strange. I must say, we were both rather foolish, fighting

over issues that weren't really important. I remember once we were sitting next to one another at my mixing desk in Forst seriously discussing that his idea of the mix was a third of a decibel louder than mine.

I wasn't against releasing *Neu! 86*, but we had to do it together, the final work, and the contract. Klaus released it in 1995 without telling me and, because he was already broke, he spent the advance and couldn't share it. That was a very sad and terrible time. In the late '80s and early '90s, there was no demand for my music. I recorded albums and nobody wanted to release them. Neu! began to get offers from labels in the '90s, but Klaus was determined to get a million advance. It was not important to know the currency, but it had to be a million!

Suddenly [German musician and actor] Herbert Grönemeyer wanted to start a label, and discovered Neu! by accident. The sad story is that his wife had just died, and also his brother, and so he decided to invest all his energy and a lot of money into Neu!. He was told by some people in London who were after us, "You can forget Neu!. You will never make it, because all these people have already failed. They are just crazy, these two." That's what he was told!

Herbert was very clear from the beginning, there was no pressure, but he would have loved to have a new Neu! album. The problem was that at that time I still didn't trust Klaus, he still owed me money, and he kept on dodging, saying, "Well, if you sign the contract and we start work, then I can give you the money..." It wasn't about the money, it wasn't that much, but it was a matter that had to be taken out of the way.

An artistic problem was that Klaus had this idea of going into the studio for a weekend and coming out with a new Neu! album.

I said, "I don't believe that we can do it that way, artistically..." We were extremely lucky to be able to record the first two albums in a short time – but it's a different thing to say, "Let's just be brilliant and geniuses and do everything in two seconds, and then just declare it great." I would not be satisfied. Of course, maybe this is also just because I wasn't very happy in the company of Klaus, after all the bad blood in the '90s.

Now I am playing with Hans Lampe again. It is strange how life goes around in circles or in spirals. He was very happy when I invited him to join me and Dieter

Moebius in Australia in 2012, and in 2013 we went to Japan together. [Rhythm guitarist] Franz Bargmann joined us soon after and we're a good team, a small, friendly team of musicians that get on well. Nobody needs friction.

On my solo albums, though, I have built on the experience I had with Klaus, and Conny Plank told me that Klaus had me in his mind when he started La Düsseldorf too. It's like a filter – Klaus trying to sound like me brought a different result, and me taking inspiration from him also created a different thing than working with him would have done. Am I proud of Neu!'s music? That's a tricky thing, pride. "I'm proud to be an American." I've always felt a lot of gratitude towards fate and to Conny Plank, and to history coming back to Neu!, to Harmonia and now to my solo work. We were so

lucky. And some of our music, like "Hallogallo", remains a mystery even to me. ▲

"THE POLICE
WERE SCEPTICAL.
'SEX COMMUNE?'
DRUGS...?
NUTCASES'"

MICHAEL ROTHER

NEU!

NEU! 2

NEU!

NEU! 86

.....SPITZENQUALITÄT!
HOW TO BUY NEU!'S MUSIC...

NEU! BRAIN, 1972

The birthplace of the driving motorik sound: simple ingredients, sure, but the whole far exceeds the sum of its parts. "Hallogallo" is sublime, with "Negativland" its unrulier sibling. **10/10**

NEU! 2

BRAIN/UNITED ARTISTS, 1973

Kicked off by the 11-minute odyssey of "Für Immer", Dinger and Rother's second album soon gets stranger – when they ran out of money, they were forced to 'remix' their recent "Super"/"Neuschnee" single. Lo-fi, but pioneering. **7/10**

NEU! 75

BRAIN/UNITED ARTISTS, 1975

After Rother forms Harmonia, he and Dinger reconcile for this lush third effort. Side One is gorgeous and elegiac, Side Two roaring space-punk that mixes the Stooges and Roxy Music, and points to Bowie's Berlin Trilogy. **9/10**

NEU! 86

GRÖNLAND, 2010

An unhappy reunion, but there are high-points among this slightly-of-its-time set, improved by Rother for its 2010 release. "Crazy" is bubblegum motorik, "Wave Mother" a beatific mix of La Düsseldorf's Viva and Rother's *Flammende Herzen*. **6/10**



Harmonia, 1974:
(l-r) Michael Rother,
Dieter Moebius
and Hans-Joachim
Roedelius

03_KRAFTWERK 2

AS THE KOSMISCHE UNIVERSE EXPANDS, KRAFTWERK'S "CONE" PERIOD CONCLUDES WITH A SCRAMBLED EXPERIMENTAL MESSAGE. BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

RELEASED: JANUARY 1972

FLUTES and bells, glockenspiels and harmonicas, violins and guitars – and not a synth nor vocoder to be heard. Welcome to the esoteric back routes and byways travelled by Ralf and Florian on *Kraftwerk 2* before they cranked up the gears and headed down the autobahn.

Known to fans as “Green Cone”, like the group’s 1970 debut (“Red Cone”), Kraftwerk’s second album finds Hütter and Schneider still driving with the L-plates on and uncertain of their direction or destination. It’s also a record that will only be familiar to those of a certain vintage or aficionados committed enough to have tracked it down on second-hand vinyl or a dodgy bootleg.

Kraftwerk 2 has never been reissued on CD and remains unavailable on the usual digital streaming platforms, and the band hope it stays buried. A record from the period dismissed by Ralf Hütter as “archaeology”, fans have been actively discouraged from excavating Kraftwerk’s pre-*Autobahn* years. “We don’t consider the first albums as important works or compositions. It was another period,” Schneider insists. “We’ve just never really taken a look at those albums,” Hütter has added dismissively. “They’ve always been available, but as really bad bootlegs.”

And there they seem to have been happy to leave them. The first three Kraftwerk LPs were all excluded from the otherwise comprehensive 2009 boxset *Der Katalog* – and although at one point Hütter reported they had found a cache of graphics and photographs from the period and hinted that a deluxe repackaging project might

be on the cards, nothing has transpired. There was a flurry of excitement early in 2020 when the first two albums were briefly listed for reissue on 180 gram vinyl as Record Store Day releases. But both albums dropped from the schedule. The easiest way for neophytes to hear *Kraftwerk 2* right now is an uploaded version on YouTube.

On with our own archaeology. After Hütter and Schneider had recorded Kraftwerk’s debut with Klaus Dinger and Andreas Hohmann on drums, Michael Rother joined the band on guitar while Hütter (unbelievably these days, as he’s the band’s sole original member) departed to complete his architectural studies in Aachen. A three-piece Kraftwerk lineup of Schneider, Dinger and Rother made various TV and radio appearances, before Dinger and Rother left to form Neu! and Hütter returned. It meant that by the time *Kraftwerk 2* was recorded with producer Conny Plank in September 1971, they were down to a drummer-less duo. In the Polaroids featured in the inside cover, Hütter and Schneider sport long hair, shades, leopard-skin jackets, leather trousers and white Chelsea boots. The look is more vampiric Jim Morrison than robotic bank clerk.

By then so-called “krautrock” was an established subgenre in the prog-rock firmament, although perhaps understandably, German bands were not enamoured with the term. “When English people started talking

about krautrock, we thought they were taking the piss,” Faust’s Zappi Diermaier complained. He may well have been right, for the term was allegedly coined by John Peel as a joke. Yet it stuck, even after Edgar Froese used the liner notes of Tangerine Dream’s second album *Alpha Centauri* in 1971 to coin the more politically correct term “kosmische musik” to describe a German music scene that took its inspiration from such diverse sources as Stockhausen, Albert Ayler, Zappa’s Mothers Of Invention, La Monte Young, the Velvet Underground,

Ornette Coleman, Terry Riley and Pink Floyd.

The German scene was certainly fertile. Plank – who had improbably begun his career as a soundman for Marlene Dietrich – had just made the first Cluster album with Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius and as soon as he had finished work on *Kraftwerk 2* was about to produce Neu!’s debut. Ash Ra Temple had recently released their debut and Florian Fricke was exploring the outer-reaches of the musical cosmos on his Moog with Popol Vuh.

Cologne’s Can had recently put out the genre-defining *Tago Mago*, Faust’s debut was making waves and Munich’s Amon Düül II were elder statesmen, with a trio of albums already to their name. Many of the kosmische bands were interconnected and Neu!’s Michael Rother saw them as sharing a common artistic purpose

**"GREEN CONE" IS
A RECORD FROM
THE PERIOD
DISMISSED BY
RALF HÜTTER AS
"ARCHAEOLOGY"**



"to move away from traditional structures ... a reaction to the Second World War and the pulse of conservative Germany".

Kraftwerk would eventually outgrow them all with their own singular vision of electronic music, of course. Yet even in such a creative environment in which cross-fertilisation was the order of the day, the Düsseldorf duo felt like outsiders, their main connection to the wider kosmische movement coming via the ubiquitous Plank. One of the main dividing lines, Plank reckoned, was that Kraftwerk were the only band he worked with who weren't on drugs.

"Nobody wanted to play with us because we did all kinds of strange things... feedbacks and overtones and sounds and rhythms," Hütter remarked in 1991. "And no drummer wanted to work with us because we had these electronic gadgets."

Rother has another explanation for Ralf and Florian's insularity. "There was a lot of arguing and psychological warfare going on," he said. After being briefly involved in exploratory sessions for *Kraftwerk 2* in summer 1971, he quit with Dinger to form Neu!, blaming "questions of temperament, of character".

As a result, *Kraftwerk 2* found Hütter and Schneider on their own and with a way to go before the arrival of Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos would create the classic lineup that the *New York Times* called "electronic music's answer to John, Paul, George and Ringo".

The album is essentially an electro-acoustic experiment in the manipulation of traditional instruments – organ, electric piano, glockenspiel, guitar, bass, xylophone, harmonica, flute and violin – with the rhythm provided by a primitive pre-programmed beatbox driven by Hütter's Hammond organ.

Those only familiar with Kraftwerk's post-*Autobahn* synth-pop bounce might think that they

are listening to an entirely different band – and in a way they would be right. The notion of guitars playing a leading role on a Kraftwerk record seems particularly shocking, and *Kraftwerk 2* is hardly an electronic rock or pop album at all, but a free-form sonic experiment in noise wrapped in the influence of musique concrète and such outré pieces as John Cage's *Prepared Piano*. It would be a stretch even to

call it a transitional record – although close attention will reveal identifiable if vague hints of what was to come.

In part the duo's musical vision was framed by the limitations of the technology available. The album was recorded in six days, the preparation done in their own rudimentary studio in Düsseldorf and then finished at the better-equipped Star Musik Studio in Hamburg, after Plank persuaded the owner to allow them free use of the facilities in the

dead hours of the night.

It was an invaluable resource, for at the time, the band's own studio in a former workshop in Düsseldorf's industrial zone, was only modestly equipped with cheap stereo tape machines, cassette recorders, homemade oscillators and a PA system constructed from junkyard components. Without a drummer they had to rely on a crude prototype beatbox – rather charmingly described in the German liner notes as a *rhythmmaschine*. "It had pre-set dance rhythms, but by changing the basic sounds with tape echo and filtering we were able to make the rhythm tracks,"

Hütter explained. As Pascal Bussy put it in *Kraftwerk: Man, Machine*

And Music, the first and still one of the most perceptive books written about the band, the *rhythmmaschine* lent the sound "the mechanical touch of light industry without the roaring thunder of heavy machinery".

CLOSE ATTENTION
WILL REVEAL
IDENTIFIABLE
IF VAGUE
HINTS OF WHAT
WAS TO COME



THE centrepiece of the album – and most of its best music – is the 17-minute "Klingklang", which takes up almost the entirety of Side One and would subsequently and famously lend its name to Kraftwerk's studio. It opens with klinging bells and klaning gongs before Hütter's *rhythmmaschine* sets up a gentle, pulse-like groove and Schneider's breathy flute provides a weightless melody over a repetitive keyboard that evokes Terry Riley's *A Rainbow In Curved Air* played by the Third Ear Band. Bucolic rather than motorik, the tempo speeds and slows seemingly at random before the final section picks up the pace with distorted guitar effects and violin pizzicato. The effect is uncluttered and soothing,

an almost childlike simplicity, with a hint of Africa in the rhythm that predicts the junk-based 'Congotronics' sound of bands such as Konono No 1.

Side One is completed with 'Atem', three minutes of heavy breathing startlingly treated with electronic effects – a quick check of the English-German dictionary reveals that "Atem" translates as "breath". It's an interesting but undeveloped sonic idea that bears the influence of Ligeti and parts of the soundtrack of Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

If one can hear embryonic touches of what was to become the





KRAFTWERK

The brief 1970–71 lineup during Ralf Hütter's absence: (l-r) guitarist Houschaeng Néjadepour, Florian Schneider, drummer Klaus Dinger and bassist Eberhard Kranemann

trademark Kraftwerk sound on parts of "Klingklang", Side Two is an altogether stranger experiment in musique concrète and how noise and found sound might be fashioned into composition. "Strom" (it translates as "current") opens with a burst of detuned and distorted lo-fi guitar ambience, like an electronic equivalent of the strange but not unappealing dissonances created when Ravi Shankar used to spend 10 minutes tuning his sitar at the start of a performance, before the piece drifts into a dirge-like drone with Schneider's flute dumbed down to a monotone whistle. It's another piece that contains the nugget of an interesting idea but remains not much more than that.

The next two pieces are also dominated by guitar, treated with echo, reverb, delay and other effects. "Spule 4" is a monochrome, anti-rock experiment in atonal scraping strings with a light-industrial ambience. The 10-minute long "Wellenlänge" ("Wavelength") is more imaginative – half-way through, Hütter's bass picks up a loping rhythm reminiscent of the Grateful Dead's "Dark Star" and develops it into a 12-bar-blues motif that for a brief moment is not a million light years away from Hawkwind's "Silver Machine". Disappointingly, it fades back into free-form noodling just when it seems about to take off for somewhere more interesting.

RALF'S VERDICT

"We were mostly like the art scene band, always on the same bill as Can. We had different drummers, and we engaged Klaus Dinger one time, but always changing. RALF HÜTTER, UNCUT 2009

The album closes with the downbeat minimalism of "Harmonika", on which Hütter's stately organ arpeggios are electronically treated to sound like a spooked harmonium. Frustrating and fascinating in equal parts, one

can't help feeling it could have been a better record if Dinger had been on drums and the group had had the luxury of more time in the studio to develop what are undoubtedly a set of intriguing and often challenging ideas.

The album's German cover, replicating the traffic cone of its predecessor with only the colour

changed, was a neat Warholian concept but may have backfired: *Kraftwerk 2* sold fewer copies than the group's debut, possibly because record buyers thought it was the same album repackaged. In Britain, Philips' prog-rock imprint Vertigo eventually repackaged the record (along with the debut) as a double set in a different sleeve, the traffic cone replaced by a blue oscillating wave. The record failed to make much impact, although one of the few who was listening intently was David Bowie. "I found their earlier stuff more invigorating than the later stuff, actually," he observed in 1978 in the middle of recording his Berlin trilogy. "I liked the stuff that appeared to be free-form."

For the most part, however, British prog fans preferred the kosmische big beat of Can's *Tago Mago* and the acid-fuelled space-rock of Amon Düül's *Dance Of The Lemmings* to the stripped-down aesthetics of *Kraftwerk 2*. It would take a vocoder, a bank of synths and a radical reinvention of the boldest kind to change that. 🌿

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE
...KRAFTWERK 2. KRAFTWERK 2. KRAFTWERK 2.....

1. Klingklang *****
2. Atem **
3. Strom **
4. Spule 4 **
5. Wellenlänge ***
6. Harmonika **

LABEL: Philips/Vertigo
PRODUCED BY: Conny Plank
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang,
Düsseldorf and Star Musik,
Hamburg
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (organ,

electric piano, bass, rhythm machine, bells, glockenspiel, harmonica), Florian Schneider (flute, violin, guitar, effects)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK - ; US -

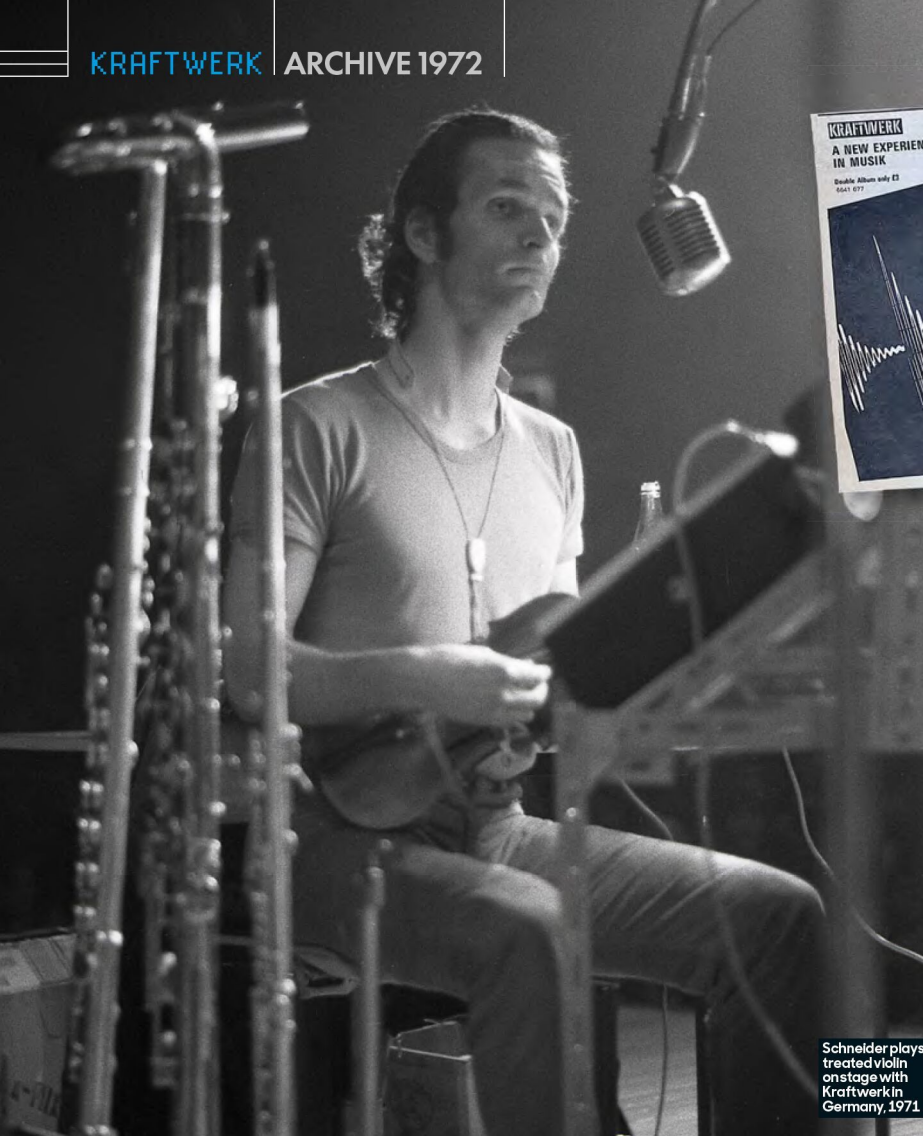
"AN ACCENT ON SOUND-EFFECTS INSTRUMENTS"



NME valiantly attempts to ask its readers to let down their boogie defences and embrace the new German scene. Free electronic improvisation. Communal living. And then, KRAFTWERK: "They simply jam for a specified period, select the tapes they deem preferable – and edit them to manageable length," observes IAN MACDONALD



Florian Schneider (left) and Ralf Hütter, fellow students and former members of experimental ensemble Organisation, onstage with Kraftwerk



Schneider plays treated violin onstage with Kraftwerk in Germany, 1971



NEW MUSICALEXPRESS DECEMBER 9, 1972



TIME was when a sudden loud crash around West Germany was probably just another F-11. These days it's more likely to be the local amateur group shifting equipment into the Stadthalle for their own economy-priced, self-promoted show. And the sort of rock they're about to play is currently the most frequent flashpoint for furious disagreement between the massed music critics of the European Economic Community.

"Germany", wrote *Rock & Folk's* Philippe Paringaux in a perceptive review of an avant-garde Hamburg group called Faust, "seems to be the only country on the Continent capable of making a really original contribution to what we call rock music."

"I don't see so many good things going on, actually," says Faust's producer, Uwe Nettelbeck. "The scene is pretty bad, mainly because there is no money around, no musical know-how. And the German branches of the big record companies don't give a damn."

Confusing? Think back to the summer of 1967. Just as the then-contemporary British underground and American West Coast scenes had their culturally and commercially forbidden

allure, so the current Continental rock circuits (about which little is known in this country) have the romantic connotations of vaguely outrageous experimentation and a new, rootless artistic life – of living the future in the present.

It's easy and pleasant, of course, to succumb to the idealisation of distant situations – in the five years since "Let's Go To San Francisco" we've still not managed to get the West Coast sound into a realistic perspective. The German scene is no exception. The main difference between the general impression of the West Coast in '67, and Germany 1969–72 is that – in the case of the latter – each view of what's going on seems to contradict the previous one.

SUCH confusion is usually a sign that something real is struggling to be born. There was no comparable confusion about the San Francisco Sound because it was a static (folk/blues-based) musical contribution; it wasn't challenging anything except the drug laws and the sartorial prejudices of a society raised on tuxedos and Bermuda shorts.

German theories about rock's advancement (says Paringaux) challenge virtually every accepted Anglo-American notion on the subject; on the other hand, German musicians generally lack the know-how to implement these theories.

Whilst it would be a mistake to assume that no German picked up an electric guitar before 1968

(Floh De Cologne were formed in 1966; Tangerine Dream in the following year; and pop groups like The Rattles, The Lords, and The Scorpions were playing long before both), no serious rock group existed until then, and the majority of musicians in the current generation of German bands have learned their craft in the interim. Exceptions to this rule – outside odd refugees from the German jazz scene – are mainly those intellectuals brought up on mainstream music, playing in orchestras or avant-garde electronic groups.

Working in their self-imposed cultural vacuum, both the amateur majority and the tutored minority of German rock can only succeed insofar as they possess original ideas. Once the ideas are there, the question of technique arises – and it is this second question that marks the division between German rock's first generation (c. 1969–71) and the more recent advances in instrumental facility and musical understanding.

BY Anglo-American standards the story of this first generation is a dismal one of almost complete technical incompetence brought to the service of short-range individual ideas on the one hand and widely accepted misconceptions on the other.

But maybe Anglo-American standards are irrelevant here.

To comprehend some of the apparently more perverse developments in German rock during this period requires a grasp of the simpler, socio-political elements of life in that country. For example: the audience common denominator on the rock circuit is that fabulous monster The Revolutionary Head, a personality which would be rejected as a contradiction in terms by almost everyone in Britain but [*NME writer*] Mick Farren.

For English-speaking kids, 1967 was a naive exultation in the pastimes of hair-growing, joint-rolling and the playing of bongos in the dirt – a holiday from the more oppressively imposed of our social responsibilities, which only lost its floral grin when it collided with Mayor Daley's knuckledusters in Chicago the following year.

Significantly, it was at precisely this juncture that the German freak scene was in its embryo state. *NME* staff writer Tony Stewart was drumming in a band around Hanover during 1967.

"That scene," he recalls, "had no immediate impact on the German kids. People working in groups over there would visit home and then come back in kaftans and beads. The Germans just couldn't understand it."

This may reflect an inborn Teutonic incapacity to be frivolous, or it may have more to do with the

West German Police riot squads; whatever the reason, the kids who solemnly dropped out all over the Fatherland in the fall of '68 had anything but a holiday on their agenda.

Unlike the Anglo-American school-leaver's freakout, the German youth revolution was intended as a thorough, point-by-point challenge to the laws and moves of a strong military-industrial establishment – and the crucial result is that Germany is the only western country to have achieved any kind of rapprochement between the socialist principles of rock culture and its dependence upon a capitalist setup which continually mocks and thwarts them.

Naturally this means there's no money in the German rock scene for German rockers – and the fact that there's lucre a-go-go for touring British and American bands sometimes strains the fabric... as the Jeff Beck Group recently discovered to their cost.

"Audience participation" in this vein is a long-established custom, and the Soft Machine ran into similar trouble when they toured northern Germany in 1968.

"Every gig we played was full of militant students who didn't want to pay to get in," recalls manager Sean Murphy. "They reckoned that the government ought to fork out for these concerts and – whilst I sympathise with a lot of what they had to say – it didn't stop it being a very gloomy and frightening experience.

"At a gig in Berlin the students burst into the hall, trampling over the ticket-people on the door, and smashing windows. One of them stood on the steps in the auditorium and delivered a speech about capitalism, and it became such a bad situation that the group had to go on or they'd have torn the place down.

"When it came to Robert's drum solo he just played a military march rhythm for five minutes... and they didn't like that at all. It was a relief to get out of the country."

Derek Moore, bassist and manager of Nektar, a British group permanently based in Germany, sees matters as a vicious circle that can be broken with a little common sense.

"Most visiting bands bring these heavy situations on themselves. They're so worried about the stories they've heard that they come on far too strong about gate receipts, not realising that a German audience just won't pay above a certain price to get in.

"German kids have decided on a value for music instead of letting managers and agencies decide it for them. We began in Hamburg two-and-a-half years ago, and toured around at low prices, getting more people in and playing to friendlier audiences. That way nobody loses."

West Germany's socialism affects the rock scene in a number of unusual ways. For instance, non-playing managers are illegal, and most groups therefore are forced to book their own gigs and handle their own promotion unless (an unlikely eventuality) the record company they're with is sufficiently interested or solvent to underwrite such costs.

The country's biggest label, Ohr, cannot at the moment afford to advertise its acts, having overspent on hiring anybody and everybody who knocked on their door and – as this situation is reflected throughout the homegrown side of the record industry – the average

German band is in dire trouble these days.

In fact the only groups making any kind of money on the far-flung gig circuits of their own country are Amon Düül II, Can, Birth Control and Nektar. "You've got to know the right people," Derek Moore explains, "or you're fighting a losing battle. On the other hand, if we do a concert with another German group we get together and have a really good time. It's not as much of a rat race as it is in England."

WORTH bearing in mind is that Germany (twice the size of England and getting on for 10 times that of Holland) is really three separate circuits.

First there's Cologne and the Ruhr towns like Dortmund, Essen, Wuppertal and Düsseldorf, with places like Munster, Osnabrück and Bielefeld in comparatively easy reach to the northeast.

Then there's the "autobahn circuit": going south from Cologne, one hits successively Bonn, Koblenz, Frankfurt, Mainz, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Ulm, Augsburg and Munich, the end of the line.

Finally, the really big ones in the north, close to the frontier with the Democratic Republic: Brunswick, Hanover, Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin.

A touring American act whips round a couple of these circuits in a fortnight or so, and is out of the country again before you can say Bremerhaven-Wesermünde. But a German band – living hand-to-mouth from one church hall to the next – can be on the road for a year without coming home.

No Musicians' Union exists in Germany to protect the rights of these wandering minstrels. This is odd until you realise that there is a semi-autonomous branch of the *Arbeitsamt* (labour exchange) for rock and jazz players.

If you're out of work, the office will find you a group free of charge – a fact which speaks equally for that famous native efficiency, and for the country's view of rock's place in the social scheme.

Germans will argue that they've eliminated the concept of rock as industrial "product". But just as valid is the view that German rock is now simply a cut-priced nationalised commodity with artificial flavouring.

Strange, too, is the average German musician's attitude towards any proposal of unionism. In the face of all adversity it appears that he would prefer to return once more to the special department of the

Arbeitsamt, rather than submit to whatever form of central control is currently being propounded.

It's the Head side of the Revolutionary – and it forms the basis of German rock theory. Ask any participant in the scene what it's all about, and he'll give you the same emphatic answer Derek Moore gave me... Freedom.

This is true in several ways, all of which have had profound effects upon the aims, the means, and the results of German rock thus far.

Pick up almost any of the 30 or so German albums available in Britain and the differences between our preconceptions about this musical form and theirs will become apparent at once.

Starting with a rejection of all the traditions behind the Anglo-American front (ie, the conceptual and/or harmonic frameworks of blues, folk, jazz, or classical pastiche), the

German bands build upon extremely simple formats, a superstructure of open-ended improvisation.

The motives for this are several, none of them entirely altruistic:

Firstly, the Revolutionary Head doctrine must be accommodated (specifically, "everybody is a star, everybody is a great musician") and for that a certain basic simplicity is advisable;

Secondly, the conception of attainment implies a hierarchy and an elite, and is therefore

discouraged (result: there are no guitar heroes in German rock, ref. Chairman Mao's "The Virtuoso Musician As The Invention And Instrument of Capitalist Imperialism");

Thirdly, as an extension of the same ideology,

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PAY TO GET IN"
SEAN MURPHY

Guitarist Michael Rother onstage with Kraftwerk, 1971



there are few recognisable songs in the repertoire of a German group (song implying songwriter implying leader);

Lastly, such a rejection of traditional formative impulses leaves the way clear for the freedom of individual expression available only to mutually co-operative organisations. Translated, this means a lot of simultaneous jamming on one chord.

Logically enough (under these circumstances) German bands tend to play their "compositions" live until they have them as they want them, following which they record and cease to play them.

One wonders why that logic cannot equally be seen to apply to Anglo-American rock-groups.

"German audiences," notes Derek Moore, "don't go for careful reproduction in concert of something recorded in a studio. They like records – but they think that live performances should be very different experiences. They're not into perfection. They're into feeling."

Some groups, like Can and Kraftwerk, are so "into feeling" that, when they go into the studio to make an album, they simply jam for a certain specified period, select the tapes they deem preferable, and edit them to manageable length. This is quite extraordinary considering the infrequency with which the average German group undertakes a recording session.

In their place a British band would be at each other's throats over whose songs were finally to be committed to the care of posterity, or (at the very least) utilising every studio facility to capture take after take of the numbers they'd pre-planned.

Neul, a group comprised of two ex-members of Kraftwerk, recently constructed their debut album out of four nights in Hamburg's Windrose Studios, casually chatting, playing with the console, and occasionally making music. The result was a best-seller.

Moreover (and just in case you were about to cite Clark-Hutchinson or even the Grateful Dead as examples of Anglo-American anticipation of this informality of approach to recording), a by-no-means inconsiderable faction of German groups, including Cluster and topliners Tangerine Dream, confine themselves in their albums to tonally free sound improvisation without tempo.

It's safe to say that, within the Anglo-American sphere of influence, not even the Third Ear Band has laid down three-quarters of an hour of music without key or regular pulse. In Germany such blatantly avant-garde proceedings are taken for granted by ordinary rock audiences.

This line of thought has in turn led to a breakdown in orthodox conceptions of a rock-group lineup. Many German bands lack drummers entirely (those which don't, frequently relegating them to a strictly metronomical function such as might easily be fulfilled by a machine, an idea pursued to its logical conclusion by Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter), and the general absence of possibilities for guitars in freeform has led to an accent both on keyboards and on sound-effects instruments.

Klaus Dinger drumming with Kraftwerk in 1971, shortly before leaving to form Neu! with Michael Rother



In Germany the synthesiser is king, but it is employed mainly for its obvious otherworldly capacities as a mood-setter. This is unlike, say, the percussive and humorous role it assumes now and then in the hands of Roxy Music's brilliant Eno.

Thus it is that several German groups consist of two, or even one performer. The final step – a band consisting of no members at all – is more than likely to materialise in the near future.

The question arises of how any of this ultimate freedom gets recorded – for the only British concern that would even consider taking on the more radical German bands is John Peel's Dandelion label, itself in an unenviable financial position.

In fact – were it not for the enterprise of writer Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser and publisher Peter Meisel – the vast majority of German groups would still be wondering what the inside of a studio looked like.

In 1970 – in co-operation with Hamburg-based Metronome Records, which undertook to handle distribution – Meisel and Kaiser founded Ohr Musik, a label to be devoted entirely to the product of German rock groups.

Their first release, "Fliesbandbabys Beat-Show" by the political band Floh De Cologne, was enough of a success for the company to continue, and to date they've released over 30 albums, including three samplers (*Ohrenschmaus* in 1970, *Mitten Ins Ohr: Eine Reise Durch Die Deutsche Popszene* in 1971, both doubles, and this year the specialist Kosmische Musik, dealing with a certain genre peculiar to Berlin, and featuring Ash Ra Tempel, Popul Vuh, Klaus

Schulze, and Tangerine Dream).

Late in 1971, the company made a separate distribution deal with BASF and started the Pilz label, to be devoted exclusively to folk rock and founded primarily upon the highly successful Ohr duo Witthüser & Westrupp.

Again they secured a first-time hit, this time with W and W's *Der Jesuspilz* (Germany's quite uncalled-for answer to *Jesus Christ Superstar*), following up with albums by Bröselmaschine and Rufus Zuphall.

A third label, "Kosmische Kuriere" (cosmic

couriers) is planned for 1973. Says Kaiser (author of the definitive book on German rock, *Das Buch Der Neuen Popmusik*): "Although most of the branch people were amused by our start two years ago, a lot of record companies have followed our example in the meantime."

The most notable of these is the Brain label, another subsidiary of Metronome, founded by two refugees from the Ohr camp, Brundo Wendel and Günter Körber.

Taking with them one of the foremost German producers, Conrad Plank, and the group Guru Guru, with which he was chiefly associated, the two Brainmakers embarked on a more international programme than that adopted by Ohr, recording several of the more British-influenced German bands and distributing albums by some of our own groups like Steamhammer, Atomic Rooster, Caravan and Spirogyra.

So far the label has 16 records to its credit and is doing very well – remarkable, since Ohr has all the top German groups under exclusive contract except a handful already snapped up by Polydor and United Artists.

GERMAN recording techniques were in a primitive state when the current boom began three years ago. These days, production standards are more than adequate, but the number of studios equipped to handle rock groups is small and most bands limit themselves either to Conny Plank's Star Studio in Hamburg, or to Dieter Dierks' 16-track at Stommeln just outside Cologne.

Amon Düül II record at Peter Kramper's small Bavaria Studio in Munich; the "cosmic" groups at a new eight-track in Berlin; and Can have their own Inner Space Productions studio in Cologne's Schloss Nörvenich, a castle converted into a cinema.

The most advanced studio of all, however, inhabits an ex-schoolhouse at Wumme, somewhere off the road between Hamburg and Bremen in the countryside adjoining Luneburg Heath. Here the sole spectacular success of German rock is quietly making its own mythology – but more of that next week.

Perhaps by now, some sort of coherent picture of the German scene should be building up in the mind of the attentive reader, but they should remember that hindsight affords both the opportunity of neat theory and the unavoidable trap of sweeping generalisations. ▲

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04_RALF AND FLORIAN

THE FINAL CHUNK OF "ARCHAEOLOGY, STILL WORTHY OF REPEATED EXCAVATION. STREAMLINING THE BEST ELEMENTS OF THEIR DEBUT, KRAFTWERK SEE A SIGNPOST TO THE ROAD AHEAD. BY JON DALE

RELEASED: OCTOBER 1973

BY 1973, Kraftwerk had cultivated an undeniable aura of detached studiousness. Their first two albums had yielded minor success, and while they weren't as cool, or quite as compelling, as groups like Can, Faust or Amon Düül II, they'd certainly started to claim their place within Germany's burgeoning experimental rock scene. They'd also burned through a number of live lineups – a curious thing, really, for a group that didn't seem to play live much at all. Core members Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, realising that they needed to present Kraftwerk to the world as a unified proposition, a cult art object, had reached out to Emil Schult, an ex-student of the bad boy of German art, Fluxus conceptualist Joseph Beuys, to help guide their image and thinking.

No doubt losing temporary members Michael Rother and Klaus Dinger to Neu!, after they'd played some great live shows and TV appearances, had been a bit of a blow to Schneider. But with Hütter back on board (after some time away, completing his architecture studies), the duo would make a fortuitous connection – they met drummer Wolfgang Flür, and quickly brought him into Kraftwerk's world. Flür had been part of some early German beat groups: originally a member of the terribly named The Beathovens, a Beatles tribute band, he subsequently joined Fruit and Anyway, before being recruited by Spirits Of Sound, where he played alongside Michael Rother. Flür had also spent some time in the Zivildienst, which was the civilian option for those not joining the military service. Flür would pass up several potential

careers, as a medical assistant and an architect, to make music.

Indeed, Flür's architects' bureau was where Hütter and Schneider first introduced themselves, in early 1973. They'd caught Flür playing with Rother, and expressed admiration for his musicianship, in typically Kraftwerkian style: "We found your drumming quite nice and it was steady drumming and 'minimal' drumming," they told Flür. "We like that, and we wanted to ask you if you would join us for a session." While initially hesitant, after a few false starts Flür would come round to Kraftwerk's way of thinking – being paid well to appear with them on the *Aspekte* German TV show no doubt helped – and the trio became something approaching a tight unit, with Flür living for a time with Schneider's family, observing the rather peculiar dynamics that informed a household run by a millionaire architect father.

That performance on *Aspekte* was tentative, with Hütter and Schneider teasing gentle melodies from their keyboards and flute on a version of "Tanzmusik", while Flür tapped impassively at an electronic drum pad. If the set looked hastily improvised, that's because it was – Flür had only recently built the electronic drum pad in his basement workshop. But you could also sense a nascent confidence in the group's interactions, a, a more relaxed embrace of melodicism, a

quizzical playfulness. There's something almost toy-like about both the instruments and the music, and something quite DIY: later, Hütter would reflect, perceptively, "We broke down the barriers between craftsmen and artists, we were music workers."

By this stage Flür was one of those 'music workers', and while he doesn't contribute to 1973's *Ralf And Florian*, it's significant that he's credited on the sleeve with "live electronic drums". For the most part, it seems, *Ralf And Florian* is about Hütter and Schneider relaxing the self-censorship

mechanisms and allowing a gentler side to shine through. If "Ruckzuck" and "Klingklang", the opening cuts on their first two albums, were programmatic and abstruse, well, here "Elektrisches Roulette" ("Electric Roulette") nudges *Ralf And Florian* open, trickling into the cochlea with ticklish electronics, before a long-distance melody unfolds over tinny keyboards and clattering drums, as though the toymaker's shop floor had just come to life. There's a hint of the Apache beat that marked out earlier songs like "Ruckzuck"

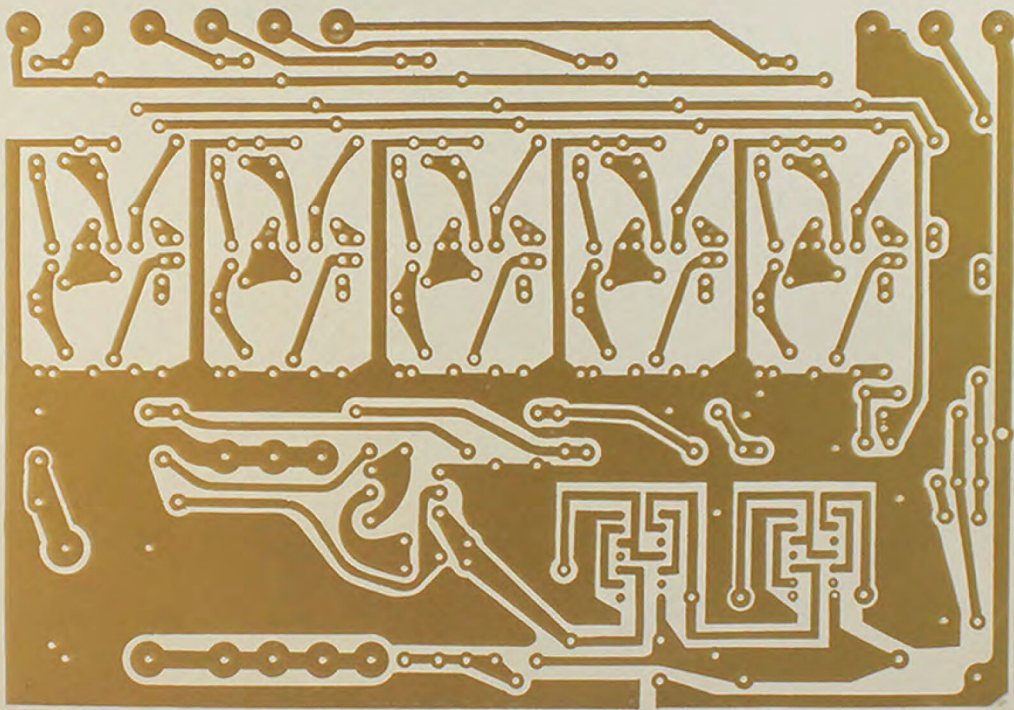
in a repetitive, simplistic drum pattern, but this ebbs and flows, making way for a tussle of micro-motifs. This music is unabashedly lovely in design and outcome – experimental, yes, but warm and welcoming.

"Tongebirge" ("Mountain Of Sound") follows, a brief interlude and exposition for Schneider's

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AND WELCOMING

KRAFTWERK

Ralf and Florian



flute, which snakecharms its way around the stereo spectrum, happily lost in electronic echoes of itself, as a plastic, synthetic buzz girds this mood piece. "Kristallo" ("Crystals") is curiously still, its trilling harpsichord tone essaying itchy sequences as a clanking rhythm taps out in the undergrowth and a psychedelic synth arpeggio squeezes out of the circuitry, almost unruly, entwining with Hütter's all-thumbs improvisation. After inverting on itself, "Kristallo" hits the races, and the song amps up, reaching an almost comedic speed and stride, as though someone in the cutting room accidentally switched from 33 to 45.

"Heimatklänge" ("Bells Of Home") closes the album's first side with stately grace, a beautiful piano and flute composition that shares the same ever-ascending, visionary-ecstatic glide as the best Popol Vuh albums of the era; you can just about imagine Florian Fricke keening for the point of heaven if he was at the keys, but Hütter and Schneider have humbler aims, and "Heimatklänge" dissolves slowly into silence.

Flipping the album, "Tanzmusik" ("Dance Music") introduces ticking electronic rhythms, and the song's chirping, pinprick arpeggios are shadowed by clattering percussion, glinting triangles and cymbals, fingerclicks and handclaps, glittery toy xylophones, vocal sighs; a wistful wonderland, "Tanzmusik" is Kraftwerk at their most charming and childlike.

It's also a precursor to the album's masterpiece, the closing "Ananas Symphonie" ("Pineapple Symphony"). Unfurling over 14 minutes, "Ananas Symphonie" is a woozy delight, an aquatic arbour of the possible, an endless playground. Languid strums on an autoharp come and go; a bossa nova rhythm clicks and clacks, quietly, as a vocodered voice gently announces the song title; wispy strands of Casper-the-friendly-ghost electronics oscillate as a Hawaiian guitar bends with the breeze. Curiously compelling, "Ananas Symphonie" keeps receding into the distance, and then rounding on itself, coming back for another day's play. The Hawaiian guitar slowly immerses itself in waters; sea spray

gives way to an electronic vista, Ralf and Florian pitching stars up into the sky as they wade off into the horizon.

Part of the magic of *Ralf And Florian* is just how utterly unique it sounds. Kraftwerk would never make another album like this; the only hints of *Ralf And Florian*'s world appear on the second side of the following year's *Autobahn*, with miniatures like "Morgenspaziergang" ("Morning Walk"). But where "Morgenspaziergang" risks

tweeness, *Ralf And Florian* is all-in. Its charm lies in the seeming innocence of its explorations, which is no doubt due to the new synthesisers that Hütter and Schneider had recently bought, a Moog and EMS, both of which are showcased on the album, but not performatively; their every glitch and gliss is folded into the duo's Arcadian compositions. Bordered by the brusque experiments of their first two albums and the epic pop-electronic narrative of their subsequent career, *Ralf And Florian* is an

unassuming delight. It's also a deeply human album, where you can hear two sympathetic musicians fully in tune with one another.

The humanising element of *Ralf And Florian* is evident in its original cover, too. Gone is the pop art brattishness of the first two albums, replaced by a knowing coyness; a photo of Hütter and Schneider, taken by the latter's girlfriend, with Schneider immaculate in suit and tie, with side parting, Hütter with chunky glasses and long hair, his locks the last trace of the group's hippie-freak past. They look for all the world like the competing heads of the high school debating team. Their old collaborator Ebehard Kranemann, who left Kraftwerk in 1971, has a slyer take on it: "On the cover

you see Ralf and Florian look wie ein alter Ehepaar – an old married couple." Others suggest the photo, and album title, are both influenced by English artists Gilbert and George, something Hütter has denied. Flip the cover and they're sitting, quiet and contended at their instruments, in a bare-bones practice room, exposed piping, lamp

Hütter and Schneider at their Düsseldorf studio with artist and post-Emil Schult, who designed the *Ralf And Florian* comic-book, 1973 (below)



Wolfgang Flür makes his first live appearance with Kraftwerk, performing "Tanzmusik" on the *Aspekte* TV show, 1973



lit, with their names flashing in cheap, gaudy neon cursive.

In the UK, that borderline-campy cover photo was replaced with an embossed circuitry diagram; some claim it was designed by legendary graphic artist Barney Bubbles. Its effect on a generation of post-punk designers is obvious when you look at the artwork for Manchester's Factory label, and their in-house designer Peter Saville once reflected of the album's UK cover, "It gave you a window into other possibilities... I felt the *Ralf And Florian* cover gave me a piece of another world. The cover was a simulation, like owning a piece of Kraftwerk. The fact that it was embossed, the



tactile quality of a circuit diagram of all things, was like an object given to me by Kraftwerk.” And indeed, circuitry and simulation would both become core to the Kraftwerk enterprise as they moved into their man-machine, replicant, robotic phase in years to come.

RALF AND FLORIAN has also gone on to have a strange half-life. Excluded from the official Kraftwerk canon, it circulated as a hint, a whisper, for decades. Copies of the album weren’t all that easy to track down, even though it saw release in many territories across the ’70s. Bootlegs of the album started to turn up in the ’90s, though, and the album’s reputation has slowly increased since. It doesn’t make the krautrock Top 50, or even bear mention, in Julian Cope’s *Krautrock sampler* – a puzzling omission, though for the most part Cope treats Kraftwerk as a sidenote to the Neu! story. But you can hear *Ralf And Florian*’s thumbprint in all kinds of music, from the electronica of artists like Die Welttraumforscher, Schlammpeitziger, and Mouse On Mars – whose “Papa, Antoine” from 1995’s *Iaora Tahiti* is a dead ringer for “Ananas Symphonie” – to the moody pop of The Pastels, and the bright-lit pop noise of Neil Campbell, who once claimed that with *Ralf And Florian*, Kraftwerk “invented a new form of music,

RALF’S VERDICT

“We were a duo all the time, we just had different studio musicians. But we were always looking for the perfect beat to be played by machines. We tried again and again, but it just never worked out” – RALF HÜTTER, UNCUT 2009

but no-one’s really noticed it yet”.

Given all of this – the musical steps forward the duo took on *Ralf And Florian*; the solidification of Hütter and Schneider as Kraftwerk’s visionaries; the newfound levity and brightness in the music, and the group’s self-representation (the first German pressing came with a comic book, after all) – why do they continue to disown, or simply just ignore, the existence of these early albums? With Kraftwerk subsequently re-presented to the world as an immaculate concept, reaching peak conceptual consistency on later albums like

Trans-Europe Express, *The Man-Machine* and *Computer World*, *Ralf And Florian* and its predecessors must feel too unwieldy, too rough

and ready. There are too many seams showing; the music admits to an improvisatory logic that the rigorous grids and four-square patterns of songs like “Pocket Calculator” simply can’t be resolved to. They don’t bend to the narrative.

There’s a faint, melancholy whiff of early-years embarrassment to these dismissals, too, a sense of it all being just child’s play. Schneider was once generous enough to curtly call this early phase of Kraftwerk “archaeology”. This discomfort is something that those once close to the group recognise, too. “For Florian and Ralf, Kraftwerk begins with *Autobahn* in 1974,” Kranemann once said. “So, the period before this, 1967 to 1973, doesn’t count. They don’t speak about it, and they don’t want other people to speak about it.” But given the worlds of possibility that still exist on albums like *Ralf And Florian*, ready to be explored by musicians for decades yet to come, that seems like a foolhardy desire indeed. 🌸

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...RALF AND FLORIAN. RALF AND FLORIAN. RALF AND FLORIAN....

1. Elektrisches Roulette

2. Tongebirge *****

3. Kristallo *****

4. Heimatklänge *****

5. Tanzmusik *****

6. Ananas Symphonie

LABEL: Philips

RECORDED AT: Kraftwerk Studio, Düsseldorf; Comet Studio, Cologne; Rhenus Studio, Cologne; Studio 70, Munich

PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider

PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (vocals,

keyboards, organ, electronics, bass guitar, guitar, zither, drums, percussion), Florian Schneider (vocals, keyboards, electronics, flute, violin, guitar, percussion), Wolfgang Flür (live electronic drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK -: US 160

05_AUTOBAHN

IN 42 MINUTES, TURN LEFT FOR SYNTHESISER CENTRAL. KRAFTWERK'S FOURTH RIPS UP POP'S ROAD MAP AND TAKES AN EXPRESSWAY TO AN ELECTRONIC FUTURE. BY PAUL MOODY

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 1, 1974

BRITAIN in 1974 now seems like a curious, almost backward-looking place. Paralysed by power cuts brought on by the three-day week, cowed by a series of IRA bombings and England's failure to qualify for the World Cup, and fuelled, seemingly, on Watney's Red Barrel and Vesta curries, the national mood was one of resignation. TV schedules featuring music hall tribute *The Good Old Days* and historical drama *Churchill's People* seemed designed to draw attention away from a reality too grim to contemplate.

Pop music, too, seemed to be short-circuiting, the charts full of novelty hits (Carl Douglas's "Kung Fu Fighting", Paper Lace's "Billy Don't Be A Hero") and the tail-end of glitter rock – these were days when looking like a bricklayer in drag was no obstacle to a *Jackie* centrefold. The sense of a country running out of ideas was compounded by the year's best-selling single, "Tiger Feet". Truly, Britain was stuck in the Mud.

By November, however, pop's most progressive voices were already aware that a radical new sound and ethos was hurtling in our direction from continental Europe. "My attention had been swung back to Europe with the release of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn* in 1974," recalled David Bowie in 2012, citing the album as a direct influence on his Berlin period.

"The preponderance of electronic instruments convinced me that this was an area that I had to investigate a little further."

Nearly half a century later, *Autobahn* remains one of the most important albums in pop history. In the year the first personal computer rolled off the production lines, the 22-minute title track was

every bit as revolutionary as the microchip, pop's future – synth-pop, electro, house, techno, ambient – emerging in a dazzling symphony.

Designed to emulate the physical and emotional ups and downs of a long-distance car journey – specifically along Germany's first-ever autobahn, the A555 between Cologne and Bonn – "Autobahn" took something as seemingly mundane as motorway travel and elevated it into (pop) art. The revolutionary use of synthesisers heralded a clean break from rock'n'roll and the blues tradition, while heading full-tilt towards a gleaming, technological future, symbolised by a road that famously has no speed limit.

The road towards this electronic "Stairway To Heaven" began on July 20, 1973, when Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider arranged to meet drummer Wolfgang Flür – already known to them from his days in local art-rock band Spirits Of Sound – in a fashionable Düsseldorf night-spot called The Mata Hari.

Even in a bar frequented by models, disco queens, gangsters and fashionistas, Flür was immediately struck by the pair's star aura – Hütter's leather trousers, shoulder-length hair and transparent nail varnish offset by "insurance salesman's" glasses straight from the '50s; Schneider in a checked shirt, flannel trousers and a neckerchief.

However, it was only when the trio drove to the yellow-tiled office building on Mintropstrasse,

downtown Düsseldorf, where Kling Klang was situated, in Hütter's grey VW Beetle that Flür realised the scale of their ambitions. In a white-walled room, accessorised only by tube lights and, in an ironic nod to suburban kitsch, a gold standard lamp with a swan neck and a plastic pineapple, the pair's equipment was arranged as if in a laboratory, Hütter and Schneider's two work stations denoted by light boxes with their first names written in bright-blue neon.

"The first keys that they pressed produced sounds that my ears had never heard before,"

recalled Flür in his autobiography *I Was A Robot*. "I had no idea that they used synthesisers. It was simply fantastic that these innovative instruments could produce such brilliant effects with so few tones. The sound of the synthesiser ranged between velvety rich and mercilessly hard. I was astonished."

Hired for his spare playing style and willingness to take a musical backseat, Flür soon became part of the band's inner circle, moving into a flat with their former guitarist Emil Schult at 9 Berger Allee, where

vast oil paintings of science-fiction landscapes and Alpine panoramas lined the walls. A charismatic artist who had been a star pupil of Fluxus artist Joseph Beuys, Schult took on the role of the band's conceptual adviser.

Cutting their hair and dressing in business suits – bespoke for Hütter and Schneider, off-the- ▶

**AUTOBAHN
REMAINS ONE
OF THE MOST
IMPORTANT
ALBUMS IN POP
HISTORY**



peg for Flür and guitarist and violinist Klaus Röder – they cultivated a deliberately asexual look that caricatured Teutonic severity while creating a distance from rock's libidinous uniform of long hair and tight, blue jeans.

Partly inspired by the living sculptures of conceptual artists Gilbert & George – whose 1970 Düsseldorf exhibition had made an impact on Hütter and Schneider – it marked a desire to escape the horrors of the recent past while drawing from the cultural aesthetic of the pre-war Bauhaus movement. “Back in the '20s, people were thinking technologically about the future in physics, film, radio, chemistry, mass transport,” recalled Hütter of their thinking at the time. “Everything but music. We feel that our music is a continuation of the early futurism.”

Equally, rather than use the Anglo-American cadences of pop, they decided to sing entirely in their native language, to both reaffirm post-war German culture and better reflect the mechanical nature of the music.

The mission statement for this new direction would be *Autobahn*.

Recorded over the summer of 1974 between producer Conny Plank's farmhouse studio in Wolperath, 20 miles southeast of Cologne, and at Kling Klang, where the up-for-anything Plank would run cables into the mixing desk from

his 16-track mobile recording truck parked in the yard outside, it was like nothing pop music had heard before.

While other albums had previously featured synthesizers, *Autobahn* positioned them front and centre. Set to electronic rhythms created using a modified Maestro Rhythm King drum machine, Hütter and Schneider utilised an array of state-of-the-art analogue keyboards – Minimoog, EMS Synthi AKS, ARP Odyssey – to create an entirely synthetic sound, embellished with only sparing use of guitar, flute, harp and acoustic and electric piano. Painstakingly pieced together in the studio using hundreds

of primitive samples and field recordings, the title track acted as the album's subversive calling card – part pop epic, part sound installation.

“In *Autobahn* we put car sounds, horn, basic melodies and tuning motors,” explained Hütter of the process. “Adjusting the suspension and tyre pressure, rolling on the asphalt, that gliding sound, pffft, pffft – when the wheels go onto those painted stripes. It's sound poetry.”

Beginning with the sound of a car-door slamming and the

revving of the engine – sampled from Hütter's own VW – with Minimoog providing the propulsive bassline (pre-dating Donna Summer's “I Feel Love” by three years), “Autobahn” unfurls like a motorway journey, the smooth, rhythmic throb of the synth providing a sense of momentum as the song progresses through the industrialised Ruhr valley and the mining towns

of Bottrop and Castrop-Rauxel, to a pastoral section where intertwined guitar and flute evoke the glacial calm of the more rural Munsterland.

A change of gear at the seven-minute mark establishes the nursery rhyme-style chorus (“*Wir fahren, fahren, fahren auf der Autobahn*”) – “We drive, drive, drive down the motorway”), before the mood shifts yet again. With tape-reversed bursts of white noise used to evoke the sensory rush of passing traffic, a proto-industrial vocal chant created using a Robovox – a

programmable speech synthesiser built by Schneider – ushers in a sense of trepidation before the song returns once more to the central melodic hook.

Written by Schult in a single day – and delivered via a vocoder – the lyric provides an additional descriptive layer. Referencing the sunlit lowlands (“*A wide valley lies in front of us/The sun shines with a glittering beam*”) and the motorway's grass verge (“*The road is a grey band/White stripes, green border*”), the chorus's obvious commercial appeal is flagged up at the 14-minute mark, when we're informed that “Autobahn” is playing on the car's radio (“*Now we turn on the radio/It then sounds from the loudspeaker*”) and it duly repeats, accompanied by a tinkling Farfisa keyboard, which suggests they were acutely aware of its nursery-rhyme appeal.

This obvious phonetic debt to The Beach Boys (“*And she'll have fun, fun, fun 'til her daddy takes her T-Bird away*”) had a two-fold advantage – making comparisons between Kraftwerk, still largely unknown outside Germany, with the platinum-selling Californians inevitable, while also ensuring “Autobahn” came with a sing-a-long chorus that would draw attention in English-speaking countries.

Not that the band would ever admit it. “In the case of The Beach Boys, ‘Fun, Fun, Fun’ is

about a T-Bird,” said a typically opaque Hütter of this shrewd move. “But ours is about a Volkswagen or Mercedes. The quote is really more ethnic. People said: are you doing surfing on the Rhine? Yes, maybe, but we don't have waves. It's like an artificial joke. But no, it's not a Beach Boys record, it's a Kraftwerk record.”

WHILE not quite on the same epic scale, the four-song suite on the second side provides an explanation for the trip – to

THE FOUR-SONG SUITE ON THE SECOND SIDE PROVIDES AN EXPLANATION FOR THE TRIP

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

“Spineless, emotionless sound with no variety, less taste... [and] damn little attempt to pull off anything experimental, artistically satisfying or new [...] For God's sake, keep the robots out of music!”
KEITH GING, MELODY MAKER, 1975

From “Autobahn” to the freeways: Ralf Hütter onstage at Alex Cooley's Electric Ballroom, Atlanta, Georgia, April 19, 1975





Suit you, herren: the classic Bartos-Schneider-Hütter-Flür lineup, who would perform "Autobahn" on the BBC's *Tomorrow's World* in September 1975

see the Kohoutek comet that passed over Germany in 1973. Opening with a beautifully understated series of synth glissandos, "Kometenmelodie 1" ("Comet Melody 1") builds into an eerie, six-and-a-half-minute soundscape, a heavily phased chord sequence and rippling piano motif designed to evoke the sight of the comet in the night sky.

The pay-off comes with the majestic "Kometenmelodie 2". A synth-pop fanfare as melodic as anything on Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* – released the previous year – its pneumatic drive and feel-good swagger made it an obvious single (inexplicably it flopped, although it was a clear influence on The RAH Band's 1977 hit "The Crunch").

If a claustrophobic "Mitternacht" ("Midnight") – a doom-laden oddity full of ominous chords and creepy oscillations – dampens the mood, the album ends on a high with "Morgenspaziergang" ("Morning Walk"), inspired by their euphoria on leaving the studio at dawn after all-night sessions. Reminiscent of "Tongebirge" from 1973's *Ralf Und Florian*, it opens with the twittering of robotic birds and a simple flute motif from Schneider, before building into a sublime proto-ambient soundscape of shimmering harps and burbling synths, the coda's use of a melodic phrase from "Autobahn" bringing the album full circle.

While a sleeve painting by Schult depicting two iconic German cars (a black Mercedes and Hütter's Beetle) travelling on an sunlit motorway was intended as the final conceptual flourish, it was, ironically, a more stark sleeve designed in-house by Phonogram in the UK, in the style of a motorway sign, that would become the perfect graphic representation of *Autobahn*'s streamlined brilliance (to add insult to injury, Schult was also asked to superimpose Flür's head over his own on the rear cover when the drummer was promoted to a permanent member of the band).

On its UK release in November 1974, however, *Autobahn* received only a lukewarm reception from critics, a minimalist live show the following year prompting an apoplectic *Melody Maker* to seethe: "Spineless, emotionless sound with no variety, less taste," adding: "For God's sake, keep

the robots out of music." However, when producer Plank's brutally edited three-minute-five-second version of "Autobahn" became an unlikely hit, reaching number 11 in May 1975, Kraftwerk were invited to perform on an edition of *Tomorrow's World*, aired on 20 September.

Soberly dressed and standing immobile behind their electronic work stations, it was an appearance as pivotal to pop history as The Beatles' on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Sleek and sophisticated, yet still somehow as soulful as anything to emerge from Detroit or Philadelphia, it was electronic pop's year zero, paving the way for a generation of deadpan synth-pop weirdos (Human League, Soft Cell, Depeche Mode, Pet Shop Boys) while laying down the blueprint for electronic pop as we know it. The good old days were over. The future had arrived. ☼

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...AUTOBAHN. AUTOBAHN. AUTOBAHN. AUTOBAHN...

1. *Autobahn* *****
2. *Kometenmelodie 1* ****
3. *Kometenmelodie 2* *****
4. *Mitternacht* ***
5. *Morgenspaziergang* ***
LABEL: Phillips/Vertigo
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter,

Florian Schneider
RECORDED AT: Conny Plank's,
Cologne
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (vocals,
electronics, synthesisers,
organ, piano, guitar, electronic
drums), Florian Schneider

(vocals, vocoder, electronics,
synthesisers, flute, electronic
drums), Klaus Röder (guitar,
electric violin), Wolfgang Flür
(electronic drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK 4; US 5

Kraftwerk in 1974:
(l-r) Ralf Hütter,
Klaus Röder,
Wolfgang Flür and
Florian Schneider



"PEOPLE PICKED UP ON AUTOBAHN"

FOYEX/SHUTTERSTOCK



A truly unique album, *AUTOBAHN* is changing attitudes to experimental European rock music in the States. Even, as [CHRIS CHARLESWORTH](#) discovers, at the band's own record label. "The success of [KRAFTWERK](#) at the moment proves that there is a big opportunity for German bands here," an importer in New Jersey confides. "Previously there had been very negative feeling towards Continental groups."



MELODY MAKER APRIL 19, 1975



KRAFTWERK have become the first contemporary rock band from Germany to enter the US Top 10 album charts; the first Continental group, in fact, to make any severe dent on the US/English-dominated chart since Focus flirted briefly with success

towards the end of 1973. But German rock is nevertheless becoming an increasingly important force in the USA. Though originally German albums were only available here as imports, record companies have begun to realise the potential of acts like Kraftwerk, Passport, Nektar, Triumvirat and Tangerine Dream.

And after Kraftwerk's success with their *Autobahn* album, the race is now on to sign them, not only for record deals but also for US management, agency, publishing and all the rest.

As the US opens its doors to German acts, so the import companies are getting wise to the fact that once an act is signed to a big company in the US, their chances of making money are diminished. So the import companies search for newer, lesser-known acts which in turn may become popular. The whole process is like the snowball running downhill.

This month Kraftwerk are touring the US doing good, if not sold out, business to crowds that

appear both older and more sophisticated than the general boogie-loving US rock fan, who is as interested in actually seeing a superstar as he is in listening to the music. For the German invasion presents a different onstage picture to the previous rock heroes – mostly English – who have conquered the US. Glamour, lighting and presentation is foreign to the Germans, who are content to play a two-hour concert without even acknowledging the presence of the audience, apart from a casual word of thanks at the conclusion.

Various reasons are being put forward for the rise in popularity of the German bands. Some feel it was inevitable that someday the US would wake up to the fact that England wasn't the only European country to export rock, while others feel it can be put down to the continuing search for something new.

Another suggested reason is the immense sales last year of the Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The*



JEM begun importing German records into the US about three years ago, along with the English albums they had been importing for several years. The company is not a retail establishment, they

deal only with stores in a wholesale basis, but they nevertheless bought in between four and five hundred copies of German albums they thought had a chance of selling.

"We have had the current Kraftwerk album available since last November, but Mercury only released it in January," 26-year-old Rick Lawler, Scott's assistant, told me this week.

"In a lot of cases an album will be lying around for six months before people will pick up on it, and this was the case with *Autobahn*. We sold about 500 Kraftwerk albums imported this month, and with it going on the charts like it has, we may sell more than a thousand even though the Mercury record is available."

Jem, claims Lawler, were the first company to import rock records from Europe into the US. Previously another company had dealt with other types of albums – traditional Italian folk songs, or Polish music, which would be likely to appeal to the various New York ethnic groups – but no-one had bothered with rock.

"Now that the record companies are starting to sign acts, we have to look for new ones," said Lawler. "Tangerine Dream have signed with Atlantic for an album, but we have four Tangerine Dream albums in stock. Amon Düül are another band who've just signed with an American label, and again we've four of their albums available at this moment."

Jem send out lists of their available product to something like 1,000 record shops in the New York area. This stock list is brought up to date each month. Recently, however, they have formed their own label, Passport Records, on which they have signed Hungarian band Omega as well as our own Nektar.

"We realised when we started importing German bands that any successful ones would soon be picked up by the big American companies and when that happened no-one would be interested in buying its imports. So in order to get a piece of the action for ourselves we formed our own label.

"Omega have had three albums out in Hungary but we have taken a 'best of' comp and made it into one album for us to put out over here."

Imported albums in the US cost between one and two dollars more than the US version. If a US version is available, the basic price for albums in the US is \$6.98 (about £3.00). Jem has a list of over 100 German groups whose albums they are constantly interested in obtaining

"Currently we have albums in stock by two groups which sound like Kraftwerk, called Neu! and Cluster. We are hoping that these will take off, along with another called Ash Ra Tempel, which is just on the borderline.

"Of course we have had failures: cases where we've imported a certain album and it hasn't sold



Moon album, a record that contains echoes of the music normally associated with German rock bands.

Having discovered the Floyd – as many US fans did for the first time with the release of this album – the fans turned to Germany for similar music. A few have even cited the success of *Tubular Bells* with its synthesiser overtones as a lead-in for German acts.

Two Americans stand out as pioneers in promoting German music in the United States. One is Marty Scott, who runs Jem Records, a record-importing company based in New Jersey, and the other is Ira Blacker, a former New York booking agent who has quit his agency to manage five German bands, including Kraftwerk.

Key player:
Ralf Hütter
with Kraftwerk
in 1974





Kraftwerk in New York, April 1975: (c/wise from left) Wolfgang Flür, Ralf Hütter, Karl Bartos and Florian Schneider

at all. One act called Floh De Cologne couldn't get off the ground here."

To import records costs Jem a considerable amount of money and they are therefore unable to take along free copies to radio stations in the hope of getting much-needed promotion. For each free record they give out, they would have to sell something like 20 extra copies to make up their profit margin.

"The whole object of our operation," says Lawler, "is to bring as much European music as possible into the US. It really makes us mad when we think how many great albums are coming out of Germany which are never released in America. The US fans deserve a chance to listen to this music, and the music deserves a chance in this country.

"The success of Kraftwerk at the moment proves that there is a big opportunity for German bands here, if only the records reach us. Jem Records has had lot to do with the current trend towards German bands, but there is only so much that a company like our own can do.

After that it's up to the big companies, but they'll soon snatch at the bait if they smell dollars."

Ira Blacker, who manages Kraftwerk, Passport, Atlantis, Randy Pie and Tea, is confident that the German trend will continue for some time. So confident is he that he's staked his immediate future on the trend by quitting his

job at the successful A11 agency, where he booked bands like Deep Purple and the Faces, to move into management.

His original interest in the German scene began nine months ago as a result of studying the behaviour pattern of Hawkwind.

"They were doing business at the box office in this country but they weren't selling records other than through outlets. This was the first time I'd become involved with the import scene and I started to investigate it by buying about

a thousand dollars' worth of German imports and listening to them all.

"Now I've been around this business a long time, so I began to realise it was business instead of an art. I'd duck out of concerts as I wasn't interested in the music any more, just the business and marketing and how to break an act.

"Anyway I was going through the German albums and playing them at home and I remember listening to one that impressed me so much I stood up and applauded at the end – in my own living room! Then I realised

I'd enjoyed myself on a musical level for once."

Eventually Blacker went over to Germany to talk business. As the first American to go over there he had, he says, the pick of the bunch to choose from and he signed up five acts very quickly and returned to the US to negotiate record deals and tours for them.

The results of his work are just beginning to show.

"I haven't just done a personal trip by pushing and promoting my own bands," he says. "I have put effort into propagating the whole German rock scene over here. I have turned over acts to other US managers and I have acted as a representative for German record labels in their negotiations with US labels.

"It was just a matter of time before it had to happen. I've spent nine months hyping the German scene in the best possible way and I could have predicted what's happening almost a year ago. Others couldn't. Elektra turned German records down. Previously there had been very negative feeling towards Continental groups.

"I think it'll last over here – the music is so very different from things that have happened before. It's very unusual and people are looking for something new. But it will be a long time before German acts ever reach the stage of playing Madison Square Garden or venues like that. The music will lose all its subtlety in a big arena. Audiences of 3,000 to 4,000 are the kind this music needs."

Blacker has placed at least 10 German-made albums with US companies over the last six months, including acts he is not directly managing. Even Motown have bought three German rock albums.

"German rock musicians have been trained in classical traditions and this gives their music a more structured sound, as distinct from the jamming or improvising that is done by US rock musicians," added Blacker. ▲

**"GERMAN ROCK
MUSICIANS HAVE
BEEN TRAINED
IN CLASSICAL
TRADITIONS"
IRA BLACKER**

06_RADIO-ACTIVITY

KARL BARTOS JOINS FOR A CONCEPTUAL, ALL-ELECTRONIC KRAFTWERK ALBUM: A PUNNING EXPLORATION OF NUCLEAR ENERGY AND THE POWER OF RADIO TRANSMISSIONS. DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL! BY LOUIS PATTISON

RELEASED: OCTOBER 1975

THREE decades after the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki enshrined the idea of nuclear energy as the ultimate destructive force, the potential of the split atom had undergone extensive rehabilitation. The prospect of nuclear power offered as close as humanity had come so far to a utopian energy source: cheap, sustainable, and – so long as you didn't mind the prospect of a little highly toxic nuclear waste, to be sealed in thick metal canisters and buried deep in the earth for millennia – actually pretty clean. On "News", a brief interlude on Kraftwerk's fifth album, we hear a West German newsreader talk of the 50 nuclear power stations due to be built across West Germany in the next decade, each one equipped to power an entire city. Once a threat, now a promise: the nuclear age had arrived.

But the West German people would not swallow this pill so easily. In February 1975, work had begun on a new nuclear power plant in Wyhl, a wine-growing community on West Germany's southwestern edge, by the Alsace border. One day later, a band of locals spontaneously occupied the site. Soon, footage of police forcibly evicting the protestors, dragging clergymen, students, farmers and their wives through the mud, made national TV. Plans for the power station would eventually be shelved. In years to come, the Wyhl occupation would be thought of as the birthplace of Germany's anti-nuclear movement, inspiring similar protests across the country.

In November 1975, just eight months on from the Wyhl protests, *Radio-Activity* hit shelves. It begun with a track named "Geiger Counter", a reference to the tool designed by the German inventor Hans

Geiger to detect and measure radiation. A dot-dot-dot sound slowly increases in tempo, as if detecting a sudden flurry of radiation waves – danger! And then, with the sly sleight of hand of a stage magician, that pulse suddenly, seamlessly segues into the rhythm of "Radioactivity".

Deeply graceful, deeply sad, "Radioactivity" is one of Kraftwerk's key songs. A slow swoon of choral synthesiser, a one-fingered keyboard melody and a series of bleeps and chatters that spell out its title in Morse code, it's a masterpiece in minimalism, doing so much with so little. On the surface it's a song about, well, radioactivity – the decay of unstable atoms into energy, "discovered by Madame Curie", the Polish physicist who won a Nobel Prize for her discoveries in the field. Her death at the age of 66 from aplastic anemia, an auto-immune disease, is widely believed to have been caused by her exposure to radioactive material, and the song has a deeply sombre feel – akin to an elegy, or a wake. For German audiences sceptical about the idea of nuclear energy, a song like "Radioactivity" must have posed a conundrum. Was this a celebration of nuclear power? A warning? A satire?

Ambiguity with a twist of provocation was, by now, one of Kraftwerk's modes. There was relatively little musical infrastructure in their native Düsseldorf, but there was a fertile art scene, and the influence of creative movements past and present – from the

technological fetishism of the Futurists to the ironic appropriations of pop art – was stamped into Kraftwerk's DNA. When the group chose to get press photos taken, beaming in lab coats against the backdrop of a Dutch nuclear power station, they understood very well the buttons they were pushing.

But the ambiguity extends further. A double meaning is writ throughout "Radioactivity" and its parent album. The first clue is to be found on the cover, designed by band collaborator Emil Schult. A black-and-white image resembling an ancient Volksempfänger radio, mass-produced throughout the 1930s in order to transmit the

Reich's propaganda broadcasts to the widest possible audience, it has a pop art quality – a Warholian nod to an era many Germans would prefer to forget. Paired with "Radioactivity"'s gentle entreaty to "tune in to the melody" it indicates that as well as radiation, this album is concerned with another kind of wave – the radio wave – and what such waves might transmit. Like, for instance, pop music.

In the months before *Radio-Activity*, Hütter and Schneider had capitalised on the success of "Autobahn" by booking a 40-date tour of the United States,

backed by two percussionists – Wolfgang Flür and a skilled new recruit fresh from the Rhineland State Conservatory Of Music, Karl Bartos. Criss-crossing the continent with their new electronic equipment in tow, Kraftwerk's music met with

AMBIGUITY
WITH A TWIST
OF PROVOCATION
WAS, BY NOW, ONE
OF KRAFTWERK'S
MODES



enthusiasm and much curiosity. Flür's memoir *Kraftwerk: I Was A Robot*, much disapproved of by Hütter and Schneider but an entertaining read nonetheless, rather punctures the myth of Kraftwerk as buttoned-up robots, documenting the tour as a giddy whirl of parties, keen groupies and – so off-brand! – a horrendous bout of food poisoning. Certainly, though, the tour also gave Kraftwerk first-hand insight into the USA's unique music infrastructure. "Autobahn" had found its way onto the Billboard Charts after being picked up by the country's network of local radio stations. It was in this spirit of modern electronic communication that Hütter and Schneider spotted the theme of what would become *Radio-Activity*. "Radio has always fascinated us deeply," Hütter told an interviewer in 1976. "We saw ourselves, Kraftwerk, in the Kling Klang studios, to be a kind of radio station of our own."

Radio-Activity saw Kraftwerk register a number of firsts. It was Kraftwerk's first true concept album, being a collection of songs convened around a central unifying theme. It was also the first Kraftwerk album to feature English-language vocals and titling (although vocals on most songs are conducted in English and German, and in Germany the album was released as *Radio-Aktivität* with German-language track titles). It was the first self-produced Kraftwerk album, the group leaving the aegis of producer Conny Plank and instead working in isolation in their own Kling Klang space, a workshop studio in the industrial district of Düsseldorf. And it found Kraftwerk debuting brand new equipment, including the Minimoog and the Vako Orchestron – a rare early synthesiser that played its sounds from light-scanned graphic waveforms encoded on film discs. The Orchestron's 'vocal choir' setting is at play all over *Radio-Activity*,

adding a curiously spiritual quality to "Radioland" and "Uranium"; the sound of a cathedral of cyborg vocalists frozen into a perpetual chorus. Finally, *Radio-Activity* marked the moment that Kraftwerk became a truly electronic band. Flute, violin, guitar – all instruments of antiquity were consigned to the scrapheap, forever.

It is hard to deny that this is when Kraftwerk really hit their stride. "Radioland" is close to perfect, a love letter to the art of listening. "Turn the dials with your hand/ Til you find the short-wave band," sings Hütter, in a tone of gentle affection. It's one of Kraftwerk's most fragile songs – just a wisp of keyboards, toy-like-melodies and a rhythm box that thunks away like clockwork – at least until the track's mid-section, when waves of electronic distortion start to

crash dizzily through the mix, as if to capture a human hand twirling the dial. The following

"Airwaves" is written to a similar theme, although conducted with much more vigour: a light-hearted and light-headed electro-pop number on which keyboard tones swirl upwards and upwards, as if caught in a warm pocket of air. On both songs, Hütter sings the lyrics in both German and English. Perhaps there were simple commercial imperatives in mind, but the

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Kraftwerk's first all-electronic album, a nocturnal nightmare soundtrack with a dual meaning: the sound of crackling transistors and Cold War paranoia. Recorded during the Baader-Meinhof trials, which divided Germany and turned even young musicians into terrorist suspects." **STEPHEN DALTON, UNCUT, OCTOBER 2009**

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RADIO ACTIVITY

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bilingual vocal feels like a further explication of *Radio-Activity*'s theme of communication.

SOME Kraftwerk albums feel engineered to pack in the most melodies, the most hooks: fresh product from the hit factory. *Radio-Activity* doesn't sound quite like that. Instead, it's often the feeling of listening to the radio itself, perhaps late at night with the covers pulled up. The mood is twilight and blurry, tracks flowing into each other without clear

demarcation. Songs are punctuated by short musical interludes, bursts of speech, literal news transmissions, or effects that feel like radio idents. The result is often more akin to a listening experience rather than a selection of singles. Not that that's a bad thing. Even today, some 45 years on from its release, a track like "The Voice Of Energy" sounds bracingly strange. A self-aware electrical generator speaks through the emphatic rasp of the Sennheiser VSM 201 Vocoder, outlining its capabilities and functions. "Ich bin Ihr Diener und Ihr Herr zugleich/Deshalb hütet mich gut," it croaks. "I am your servant and your lord at the same time/So take good care of me..." Almost as minimal, "Radio Stars" sends its serene lyric – not about singers and actors,

but quasars and pulsars – drifting out into an inky-black void.

Kraftwerk are often talked about as incorrigible futurists but, spiritually, *Radio-Activity* feels old, ancient even. From the sinister old wireless on the cover to the Morse code chatter that runs through "Radioactivity", the tributes to Madame Curie to the halting, old-world folk melodies of the closing "Ohm Sweet Ohm", Kraftwerk's fifth album resembles a paean to times past. Perhaps this weighing of history served a deeper purpose, though; the ghosts of old Germany exorcised so that a new future might emerge.



Tuning in to nuclear fears: Ralf Hütter on stage, Rotterdam, March 21, 1976



"We saw ourselves... to be a kind of radio station of our own": Kraftwerk in Rotterdam, March 21, 1976

Certainly, those with an eye for possible futures were listening. Shortly after *Radio-Activity*'s release, David Bowie called Kraftwerk his favourite band. "Sound as texture, rather than sound as music," the Thin White Duke mused to *Rolling Stone*. "Producing noise records seems pretty logical to me." Bowie invited Kraftwerk to play support on his *Isolar (Station To Station)* tour in 1976. While friendly with Bowie, Hütter and Schneider turned him down. Later, Wolfgang Flür speculated on their decision: "It is the same policy that they use today, to be absolutely on their own. No mixing with enemy cultures; not 'enemy', but foreign cultures. Nothing completely influenced by other music styles, cultures, instruments, sounds or countries... We had to be on our own, self-referential." Unabashed by rejection, Bowie played Kraftwerk's music in lieu of a support band, accompanied by footage from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's surrealist touchstone, *Un Chien Andalou*.

"Radioactivity" entered Kraftwerk's live repertoire immediately, and for a while was one of their most technically impressive live set pieces, Flür playing rhythms using an experimental 'drum cage', sounds triggered by

the percussionist breaking invisible light waves with a wave of his limbs. That, at least, was the idea, although it didn't always work when hauled out onstage. In *I Was A Robot*, Flür recalls a bemused review of a show in Liverpool that seemed very prepared to give these cryptic Germans the benefit of the doubt. "The remarkable hand movements of their drummer, which resembled those of a traffic policeman, were incomprehensible. The quietness at the beginning of their concert was rather oppressive. Did Flür want to give us a sign? What message

was he trying to transmit?"

Like spent uranium sealed deep beneath the soil, "Radioactivity" would enjoy an extended life, and remains a staple of the live repertoire to this day. Notably, however, it has moved with the times. Re-recorded in 1981 for *The Mix*, the song shed its former ambiguity and emerged as an explicitly anti-nuclear song, the lyric rewritten as "stop radioactivity", with references to sites of nuclear contamination: Chernobyl, Harrisburg, Sellafield, Hiroshima.

It was updated further for live shows in 2012 to reflect the Fukushima disaster, with new lyrics translated into Japanese by a friend of the band, Ryuichi Sakamoto. Forty-five years on, as the world faces a new set of existential challenges, the stories *Radio-Activity* tells – of isolation, of self-aware machines, of the dangers of science unleashed and unchecked – feel more pertinent than ever. ♾

SONGS ARE PUNCTUATED BY SHORT MUSICAL INTERLUDES AND NEWS TRANSMISSIONS

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE
...RADIO-ACTIVITY. RADIO-ACTIVITY. RADIO-ACTIVITY.....

1. Geiger Counter ***
2. Radioactivity *****
3. Radioland *****
4. Airwaves *****
5. Intermission ***
6. News ***
7. The Voice Of Energy *****
8. Antenna *****
9. Radio Stars *****

10. Uranium *****
11. Transistor *****
12. Ohm Sweet Ohm *****

LABEL: Kling-Klang/EMI/Capitol
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang, Düsseldorf

PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (vocals, Minimoog, Vako Orchestron, drum machine), Florian Schneider (vocals, Synthia Vocoder, Arp Odyssey), Karl Bartos (electronic drums), Wolfgang Flür (electronic drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK –; US 140

"WE ARE NOT PART OF THE MUSICAL WORLD"

Kraftwerk use the breakthrough of *AUTOBAHN* and its accompanying UK tour to assert their difference from their musical contemporaries. "We make sound pictures of real environments," FLORIAN SCHNEIDER tells KARL DALLAS



Suited and booted:
Kraftwerk in New
York City, 1975 -
(l-r) Karl Bartos,
Ralf Hütter,
Wolfgang Flür and
Florian Schneider



MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 27, 1975



WE were on a motorway, natürlich, in a Mercedes-Benz diesel limo, Ralf and Florian and Wolfgang and Karl and me, and a car draws up alongside and winds its window down. We do the same. Eventually, over the wind noise and through a

thick Scottish accent and by dint of various gestures, I got the gist of what the guy in the other car was trying to say. I wound the window up again to keep out the cold of Renfrewshire.

"He says it was a great concert," I told Ralf.

"He's crazy," Ralf replied shortly. "It was the worst concert we have ever done in our lives."

Which made things a lot easier for me, because after having been an admirer of the music of Kraftwerk for many years, and having travelled on the British Airways shuttle specially to hear them, it had been something of a comedown to discover how underwhelming it was.

Nevertheless, there was something appropriate about the conversation, from car to car flying through the night on the motorway – or autobahn – for of all the German bands, they have made the most of their roots in modern technology, feeling happiest when the environment is as artificial and synthetic as possible.

Not for them the massive slurs of Mellotron sentiment identifiable with Tangerine Dream of Berlin, nor the howls of agony from the late lamented Faust of Hamburg. Their home is Düsseldorf, an industrial town, and when they started, after Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider finished their classical studies on keyboard and flute respectively, they took a sternly industrial name for their band. It means power station.

When we met and shook hands, in that very correct German way, my name drew a rhapsody about the capital of Texas from Ralf: "It is such a wonderful town, Dallas," he said. "All that concrete. When we played there during our American tour it gave us much inspiration for our music."

The music in Edinburgh had been rather less than inspired, and in a band so dependent upon technology the reason had to be... technical problems. "We have a new thing which is a speech synthesiser," said Ralf. "It really is a kind of computer terminal, designed to speak rather than to typewrite, and it has a typewriter keyboard on which you can put in any syllables phonetically and it will speak them. We can feed the output of the terminal into any of our synthesisers and use it to program them, so we can have the music talking or singing.



"IT IS SUCH
A WONDERFUL
TOWN, DALLAS.
ALL THAT
CONCRETE"
RALF HÜTTER

"Unfortunately, there is some malfunction and we are unable to perform with it. We have some of it on

tape, so we can use some of the effect, but of course that is just a sort of overture, to set the scene. In itself, it is not very creative.

"We spent most of the afternoon trying to get it right, but we failed, and so by the time we must perform, we are nervous."

If Kraftwerk's music is as far as you get from the Gothic romanticism of Tangerine Dream, visually they also present a completely different image. In comparison with Edgar Froese's untidy red locks, Peter Baumann and Christoph

Franke's long, lank tresses, the Kraftwerkers are shorn to severe short-back-and-sides.

They wear suits, white shirts, ties, the only concession to informality being the blazer and white jeans worn by Florian, which gave him an atmosphere of Lords or Henley between the wars, rather than a rock musician. But then, despite their musical backgrounds and chart success

with *Autobahn*, not one of them regards himself as really part of the rock scene.

"We are not part of the musical world, anyway," said Ralf. "Düsseldorf is not a musical town and we are not part of a musical movement. And more than movements in music we are rather more aware of the more spiritual movements in general, in art or psychology, science, and of course, general technology."

Why, I wondered, had they opted to become popular musicians rather than performers of the classical music that had been their first introduction to music?

"As far as classical music is concerned," said Ralf, "we realised the schizoid nature of the actual performer and his real self. We felt we wanted to play our own music, not just to be a medium for somebody else. And then we are fascinated with the mass media."

But couldn't they still perform for the cultivated, imaginative audience that appreciates Stockhausen, Terry Riley, and the rest of the canon of modern composers? After all, Düsseldorf may be an industrial town, but it is within transmitting range of Cologne, home of the electronic studio of West Deutsche Rundfunk, central point for the European avant-garde?

"It's true," said Ralf, "that's where we grew up in a sort of crossroads between France and



"We like simplicity": Kraftwerk take tea in the Big Apple, 1975

"Autobahn", for instance, with its Doppler-shift screams across the stereo image, is a sound picture of a real motorway's traffic. And a series of other items in their show, like their impression of a comet, had this same rooting in reality.

"What we are doing is to make sound pictures of real environments," agreed Florian. "Tone-films."

Ralf added: "We strive for clarity, not nebulousity. We are trying to recreate realism, not vague images."

But it was a cold kind of realism, I suggested, impersonal rather than on a human scale.

"We are ambivalent about the impersonal nature of modern life," said Ralf. "On the one hand we are excited by the colossal scale and coldness of modern technology. On the other hand, we can be repelled by it. What we try to do, however, is to stay right in the middle, drawing feelings from both aspects."

"As a result, our music is at the same time impersonal and also very personal."

"Super-personal," suggested Florian.

"The music plays itself sometimes," said Ralf, "because with the repeated rhythms we can go into a sort of a trance."

"Not a drug trance," Florian was anxious to point out. "It is very clear-minded. It is like when you are driving a car, you can drive automatically without being consciously aware of what you are doing, while to be in a drug trance would be very dangerous indeed."

LIKE both Tangerine Dream and Faust, Kraftwerk begin their concerts in semi-darkness. But as they play, a series of static messages are flashed at the audience. The names of the four members of the band are flashed up in neon in front of each of them: Ralf at the left on keyboards, Wolfgang and Karl in the middle on electronic drums – which are actually flat platforms covered with a number of circular metal discs, and the drum-sticks are brass tubes connected to the electronics by lengths of wire, so that when the "stick" strikes the "drum" an electric connection is made – and on the right, Florian, on a sort of electronic woodwind, driven by a machine which makes a gentle, rather melancholy continuous sigh that is audible between numbers.

A slide is focused on a slightly billowing backdrop. A semi-circular railing of fluorescent lights comes on from time to time, sometimes white and harsh, sometimes red and warm, always backlighting the four figures crouched over their instruments, hardly moving.

I asked if they hadn't thought of using less static images, movies perhaps, or video.

"We only use the visuals as a framework," said Florian. "It is like the movie stills you see outside a cinema. When you see the movie you get the whole idea. We want merely to give clues to the audience and leave space in their minds for their own ideas of what the music is saying."

"With a static presentation it is impossible to cover up bad playing with some special action. We communicate directly to the audience what we are feeling, like tonight. If things have gone badly, they always know it, as we do not move around."

"But although we do nothing, we always feel like dancing. We feel our whole body and our whole nervous system through our fingers and through them, we feel our music." ▲

Germany, so we were exposed to the musique of Paris as well as the electronic music of Cologne. That is what opened up our ears in the late '50s.

Florian said: "But a lot of art music excludes itself from the audience. It gets only a small audience. Another thing is that the structures tend to get very complex, relying a great deal upon overdubbing, so the music cannot be performed live."

"We wanted very much to perform live, so we had to devise a kind of music it was possible to play on stage. We like simplicity. The simpler the better."

"We like to be understood also," added Ralf.

One thing that struck me about their performance was that, contrary to Stockhausen's dictum that the best electronic music was that which had no outside reference, to "real" instruments or sounds, they used their synthetic means to recreate a sort of electronic naturalism.

**KRAFTWERK
ON TOUR**

WITH **AJ WEBBER**

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7th September – Bournemouth Village Bowl
9th September – Capital Theatre, Cardiff
10th September – Town Hall, Birmingham
11th September – Empire Theatre, Liverpool
12th September – Town Hall, Middlesbrough
13th September – Citadel, Edinburgh
14th September – Free Trades Hall, Manchester
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"DRIVING TO THE HORIZON"

The surviving members of Neu! tell *Uncut* about making what is possibly their greatest track, "Hero" – a groundbreaking mix of driving motorik guitars and angry proto-punk vocals. "It's astonishing to think that people still talk about us 50 years later," **MICHAEL ROTHER** tells **ROB HUGHES**. "It was just two people clicking."



UNCUT JANUARY 2023



AFTER a year apart, guitarist Michael Rother and drummer, singer and guitarist Klaus Dinger had opposing visions when they regrouped as Neu! in 1974. Rother wanted to develop the textural music he'd recently been exploring with Harmonia, while his bandmate was shifting towards more primal rock'n'roll. The compromise was *Neu! 75*, which appears along with its two predecessors and a remix album on the boxset *Neu! 50!* – *Uncut*'s archive album of 2022.

The showpiece of *Neu! 75* is "Hero", where Rother's gorgeous melodies and drones are stamped by Dinger's proto-punk vocals, raging against the perceived injustices of his personal life and career. It ends with a bitter declaration: "Your only friend is music until your dying day!" The message is intensified by the powerful playing of his brother Thomas and Hans Lampe, two drummers who went on to record with Dinger as La Düsseldorf.

"The way Klaus sings on 'Hero' is so impressive," marvels Rother. "He wasn't used to doing vocals, but he did it – bang! – just like that. And of course it gives that track so much of its energy."

As with the rest of *Neu! 75*, "Hero" was guided by producer Conny Plank, the godfather of the German kosmische scene. Rother and Dinger were polar opposites as personalities, never socialising together and rarely discussing the music

they made, but Plank was able to illuminate their unique studio chemistry. "Conny was a marvellous producer, because he had a spirit that just made things happen," explains Lampe. "You were somehow inspired to be different. Recording with him was really magical."

ROTHER and Dinger had already decided to go their separate ways by the time the album was released in the spring of 1975. "Klaus and I never saw ourselves as a band, it was a project," says Rother, who attempted to reunite with Dinger a decade later, only for the sessions to fall apart amid much bitterness. "After creating *Neu! 75* he went with La Düsseldorf and was very successful. I went back to Harmonia and was very unsuccessful. But happy!"

When Dinger died in 2008, Neu! had long passed into legend, with *Neu! 75* arguably their greatest and most influential work. "It's astonishing to think that people still talk about us 50 years later," Rother reflects, "because we were only concerned with making music together. It was just two people clicking."

MICHAEL ROTHER: Playing with Roedelius and Moebius in Harmonia had advanced my understanding of possible combinations of harmonies and melodies. At the same time, I'd developed ideas that I knew would only work with Neu!. So the plan was to record another album with Klaus and then go back to Harmonia.

KEY PLAYERS



MICHAEL ROTHER:

Lead guitar;
co-writer;
co-producer



HANS LAMPE:

Drums



STEPHEN MORRIS:

Neu! fan
(Joy Division/
New Order)



STUART BRAITHWAITE:

Neu! fan (Mogwai)

NEU!

HANS LAMPE: I was working as an engineering assistant with Conny Plank when I met Michael and Klaus for the first time, when they recorded “Neuschnee” and “Super” for the second Neu! album. A year or so later, Klaus asked me if I’d like to join a new project called La Düsseldorf. Klaus wanted to start playing guitar, and maybe even do vocals, because he thought he could reach people more directly that way. So that’s where the idea came from. I’d play the drums, together with his brother, because he liked a powerful drum sound.

ROTHER: In the summer of ’74 I drove to Düsseldorf and we had some rehearsals with Klaus and the two drummers: Hans Lampe and Thomas Dinger. Then we had this strange concert [*the Dingerland Free Concert in Ratingen, Germany, September 14, 1974*]. Maybe you’ve seen the clip, where Klaus is doing his Pete Townshend guitar thing. For two seconds, the film crew

caught me sitting at the back, with a sour expression on my face. This idea that Klaus was going for, to be front of stage, had slightly too much show and too little music. That was my criticism. I wanted to make real music and not be an entertainer.

LAMPE: Klaus also wanted to establish his own label, the so-called Dingerland label. And he wanted to release music from four things: Lilac Angels, a solo artist called Fritz Müller, then Neu! and the new project, La Düsseldorf. We played two concerts with Michael and Klaus on guitar and vocals, with Thomas and me on drums. But this whole label project failed and ended in fiasco in ’74.

ROTHER: The two-drummer thing was basically something that Klaus and I didn’t agree on. So before we went into the studio in December, we talked about how we would go about the concept.

**"I WANTED
TO MAKE
REAL MUSIC
AND NOT BE AN
ENTERTAINER"**
MICHAEL ROTHER

LAMPE: Klaus originally wanted to make the whole album with four people, all of us together. But Michael said, “No, that’s not really what I want.” So the compromise was doing one side with four people and then the other side would just be Michael and Klaus.

STEPHEN MORRIS: I was already a big Neu! fan, ever since buying the first album [1972] with money I’d got for my birthday. It was fantastic, the ♥

complete opposite to most popular music of the time. And the thing that seemed incredible to me was that just two people could do this. That was a real eye-opener. So when I first heard them with two extra drummers I was very confused, because it was like they'd suddenly entered a different world. I remember thinking, 'Oh, they've turned into a proper band now!'

LAMPE: It was very interesting watching how Klaus and Michael worked together, because Klaus was a big man with this enormous power, always driving to the horizon somehow. And Michael had this soft power. They were perfectly matched, there was a musical understanding between them. We'd already performed fragments of "Hero" at the two concerts in 1974, though Klaus didn't have a name for the song. So when we started to record it in the studio, the lyrics were not clear. Klaus only finished them at Conny's place.

ROTHER: It sounded great when we played with the two drummers – very powerful, very energetic. And especially when Klaus went to do the vocals on "Hero". That was a real moment.

LAMPE: Klaus's vocals were angry because of the way things were developing. He was frustrated with the record company, who weren't willing to buy or release his label's recordings. And he'd already had to pay out a lot of money. There was also frustration about his life situation.

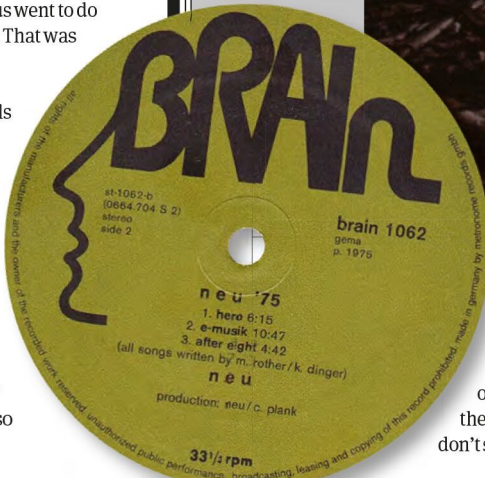
ROTHER: Several elements in his life went wrong. Hesings about his girlfriend on "Hero" – "Back to Norway!" Her family were from Norway, so they'd moved back there and Klaus thought her parents took her away from him. Klaus missed her very much and was still very much in love.

LAMPE: This story with Anita [Heedman] was a theme running through his life. She left Düsseldorf at the end of '71 or the beginning of 1972, with her parents. So this was already a frustration for Klaus, and he wanted to get her back. But in those days, it cost a lot of money to travel to Oslo and he'd tried it several times.

ROTHER: Then there was the failure of his label. Klaus always had big plans and rented an office in the most expensive street in Düsseldorf. But the label went bankrupt. He also sings: "Fuck the press!" I don't know why he felt that bad about the press, maybe he felt neglected. I also suffered from rejection and neglect with Harmonia, but

FACT FILE

WRITTEN BY: Klaus Dinger and Michael Rother
RECORDED AT: Conny's Studio, Wolperath, Cologne
PRODUCED BY: Conny Plank and Neu!
PERSONNEL: Klaus Dinger (lead vocals, rhythm guitar), Michael Rother (lead guitar), Hans Lampe (drums), Thomas Dinger (drums)
RELEASED: March 1975 (on Neu! 75)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: Not released as a single



everyone has their own way of dealing with those things. Some people don't want to accept that other people have their own opinions that don't suit you.

LAMPE: Klaus had some fragments of vocals for "Hero", but me and Thomas had already left the studio when he came up with more lyrics. It wasn't until he brought the first rough mixes to Düsseldorf that I heard them. The lyrics really gave it something special.

ROTHER: I remember sitting with Conny at the mixing desk and Klaus going, "OK, I'm recording the vocals." And he delivered on the first take. Conny and I just looked at each other and said, "That's it!" But Klaus came in, listened and wasn't happy. So he did another take, but agreed with us that the second recording was not as convincing or as powerful as the first flush. That makes total sense, because if you listen to the anger, frustration, sadness and even rage that he expressed, you can only deliver that once. There's something about the way Klaus phrased everything spontaneously. It's slightly loose, but also spot on. Try to recreate that and you will fail. Even in that respect, you hear the drummer in Klaus, with the right

stresses and the right way to bump into the next chord.

MORRIS: You can hear Klaus in a different mode, wanting to be a rock star. That's one of the things that happens in bands. I can understand him wanting to be the frontman, but I think it takes a peculiar kind of person to actually want to be at the front of a band.

LAMPE: I think we tried "Hero" twice in the studio, sorting out the intro and where the breaks were. Because we had already played it that year, we knew the main things were OK. But we needed a clearer starting point and it was still open-ended. I think the third take was the one.

ROTHER: Klaus was not a guitar player, but he could play a very precise, energetic rhythm guitar, with a good sound. That was quite amazing. I think I used two or three guitars on "Hero". There was the melody and then: 'Braaang!' There's this guitar pedal that floats in, which adds some kind of spacey element to it.

MORRIS: When you listen to "Hero" now you think, 'How the bloody hell does it sound like it was done two or three years later?' It sounds like it was recorded at the same time as "Anarchy In The UK" and all that stuff. It's incredible how ahead of the times it was.



Bringing the house down: Neu!'s Michael Rother (left) and Klaus Dinger (right) with friends, 1972

fantastic on there. I read one interview where Bowie was saying he was listening to a lot of Neu!, and I could see it was the sort of thing he would be into. When he did *Low* I remember thinking it was like Bowie's kind of tribute to Neu!, because it had that same kind of double aspect to it: the 'up' side and the ambient half.

LAMPE: It's great that "Hero" and *Neu! 75* have had so much attention as the years have passed. The Neu! sound has such beautiful melodies.

BRAITHWAITE: There's something about Neu!'s music that's very open, almost in the same way that a lot of great techno is. It's all about the journey, not the end. Even before we heard their music, that was something Mogwai was trying to do in a less motorik way. I think of Mogwai songs that are pretty directly Neu!-influenced, like "How To Be A Werewolf" and "Crossing The Road Material". That kind of less-is-more approach is something that we've definitely taken from them.

MORRIS: I think you can judge how important they are by the amount of records you hear nowadays that have that Neu! element in there somewhere. The music has an appeal that's timeless. Their records still sound like they could've been made last week.

ROTHER: I always listen to "Hero" and see Klaus, because there's so much of him reflected in it – the energy, his emotions, the artistic quality, the way he sings. Now that many years have passed, I can see that "Hero" is just a wonderful track on which I also did some rather nice guitar, even

if I say so myself. Without my guitar, "Hero" would not be the song people know. It was always important for us to join in the other's world. Those flavours added up to something special. ▲

"THE NEU!
SOUND
HAS SUCH
BEAUTIFUL
MELODIES"
HANS LAMPE

STUART BRAITHWAITE: "Hero" is almost a proto-punk song. It's got that quite frenzied energy, almost like a little bit of an outlier. They're one of those bands that I always think of as instrumental, but the vocals are so important to this song. *Neu! 75* is probably my favourite Neu! album, because it has more variety. It's got the big, stomping kind of songs and a lot of really contemplative parts as well.

LAMPE: After *Neu! 75* came out, David Bowie mentioned a few times that he was inspired to record "Heroes" after listening to "Hero". Brian Eno and Bowie both really liked Neu!. There's a story that Michael was going to play on the "Heroes" album, but this didn't happen in the end. It was a pity, because if you listen to Bowie's "Heroes", it has melodies that sound just

like the way Michael plays guitar.

ROTHER: As I understand it, Bowie's sales were going down and I'm pretty sure his management were getting a bit worried when they heard he wanted to work with this crazy, unpopular German musician! Maybe they decided they had to help Bowie by preventing this collaboration from happening. That explanation makes sense to me, because David was just as enthusiastic as I was when we talked, and I can't imagine that enthusiasm suddenly disappearing two days later. My other recommendation was suggesting that [*Can drummer*] Jaki Liebezzeit played on the ["Heroes"] sessions.

MORRIS: I think Michael would've been

Conny Plank in his studio at Walperath, Cologne, Germany, January 23, 1982



TIMELINE

1972: Formed the previous August from the remnants of an early iteration of Kraftwerk, Neu! release their self-titled debut. It sells just 30,000 copies. A second effort, *Neu! 2*, lands in 1973, with similar results.

SEPTEMBER 1974: Dinger is the driving force behind two free

open-air concerts in Ratingen, Germany, to showcase his short-lived Dinger and label. One set features a raw prototype of "Hero", played by the lineup that would make *Neu! 75*, documented by local TV station WDR.

DECEMBER 1974: "Hero" is recorded during the initial

stages of sessions for *Neu! 75* at Conny Plank's studio outside Cologne.

MARCH 1975: *Neu! 75* is issued on Brain records in Germany, ahead of its release on United Artists in the UK. As with both previous Neu! albums, it fails to chart.

"WE'VE ONLY

As KRAFTWERK await the departure of their Trans-Europe Express, they chat to MM



JUST BEGUN"

about dancing, their European nature and their increasingly streamlined music...



Out of the blue:
Kraftwerk live at
the SF Festival,
Rotterdam,
March 21, 1976

MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 23, 1976



RALF HÜTTER tends to quote *Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance* at you if you complain about the ways in which Kraftwerk are subjecting themselves to domination by the machine.

"People call us mechanical puppets," he says "and we don't deny that. We have written a song called 'Showroom Dummies', and we are first standing there, static, like in a shop window, then suddenly awareness, then going out, going through the glass and taking a walk, through the city and going to a discothèque, starting to dance, then realising again, that when you're dancing you're being a mannequin, the same type of psychological situation, like a puppet.

"From there we are trying to do some other things with the song – it's not finished yet – like an electronic tap-dance where the shoes can trigger off sounds. With these electronics you can do all kinds of things, connect different parts of the body to the sound system."

The world's first bionic musicians! "We've not been dancing before. We were too inhibited. We found there are very few people who produce music and dance themselves. When we came back from America last year we learnt to dance again, and this should produce the music. Not dance to existing music, but through dance create the music, and the first step we have found in this direction has been from the drumkit through body movements to trigger the music. At the moment it is super simple, although

**"OUR SET-UP IS
PLUGGED INTO
OUR MIND AND
THAT COMES OUT
OF THE SPEAKER"**
RALF HÜTTER

we have had some technical problems with it, if the light beams are not exactly aligned, but now we only trigger the percussive side of the music. Later, we'll find things out so we can play body melodies."

Adds Florian Schneider: "It starts with your fingers, a finger ballet. But then you ask why not take the entire body?"

"Make the machinery an extension of the body," says Ralf. Some might say the man was becoming an extension of the machine...

"It is both. My body stops here, but when we plug into Kraftwerk, then the whole set-up is plugged into our minds and what is in our minds comes out of the speaker.

"But that feeds back into ourselves because with the speaker we can listen to our own

sound and this influences what we play next. It's like a trigger in the system."

This suggests a great deal of spontaneity and improvisation, but Kraftwerk's music

has become more organised, rather than less.

"It's both ways. Probably we are more organised than we used to be in the past. We have more material than we can play. We take the records as a kind of score and from there we plug it in. We don't so much play our repertoire as play with our repertoire. We have a great quantity of composed music.

"But when we play 'Autobahn', for instance, we drive different types of cars each time, according to our mood. But we know more today than we knew two years back. Then we were more free-form, but now we have discovered certain things and we try to hit them straight."

The band has now gone to Düsseldorf to finish its next album, which will be less of a concept than the last two. One of the tracks, "Europe Endless", is about what it means to be a Euroman.

It might be felt that Kraftwerk had taken the mechanisation of music about as far as it could go, but they disagree.

"I think we just started," says Ralf. "Travelling outside Germany has opened us up and made us do things we didn't think we could do before. Maybe everything we did before was just an opening scene." ▲



Mechanical puppets: Kraftwerk set the sartorial trend for bank managers

GUSBERT HANEKROOT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LIVE REVIEW. LIVE REVIEW. LIVE REVIEW. LIVE REVIEW. LIVE REVIEW.
ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1976.....

WME OCTOBER 16, 1976



KRAFTWERK are a very different matter. Their names are Ralf, Karl, Wolfgang, and Florian – I know because they had neat

blue chemist neon signs sitting on stage in front of them to tell us. They are a very neat band, all dressed in suits and ties and short hair like bank managers.

They all stand stock still except Karl and Wolfgang, who have to move their arms a bit to play bass and drums – not ordinary bass and drums, but small flat suitcases on legs like electric pianos – that's right, electronic pads.

Bryan Ferry might strive for this '40s decadent look, but underneath everyone knows he's really a scruffy art student. But with these guys – they'd actually look weird in a pair of jeans. Since it was dark on stage and we couldn't see what they looked like, they showed slides of themselves wearing bow ties, looking blank.

Their music was blank, too. The electronic melodies flowed as slowly as a piece of garbage floating down the polluted Rhine.

They had a scaffolding which enabled first Wolfgang, then he and Karl, to stand aside making traffic cop signals and create the electronic rhythm section simply by their hand gestures breaking photoelectric beams connecting various parts of the structure.

Their hands glowed blue and it was all a bit ridiculous except maybe on "Radioactivity".

Despite some of the most advanced sound equipment I've seen for a while their music was largely old-fashioned whistles and squeaks on a ring modulator and keyboards. They are actually old-fashioned realists – they use electronics to imitate their surroundings. Just as the "Pastoral Symphony" has cuckoos and stuff in it, so Kraftwerk love to imitate trains (on "Trans-Europe Express"), radio static and Morse code (on "Radioactivity") and of course their big hit "Autobahn", where the doppler effect of cars with

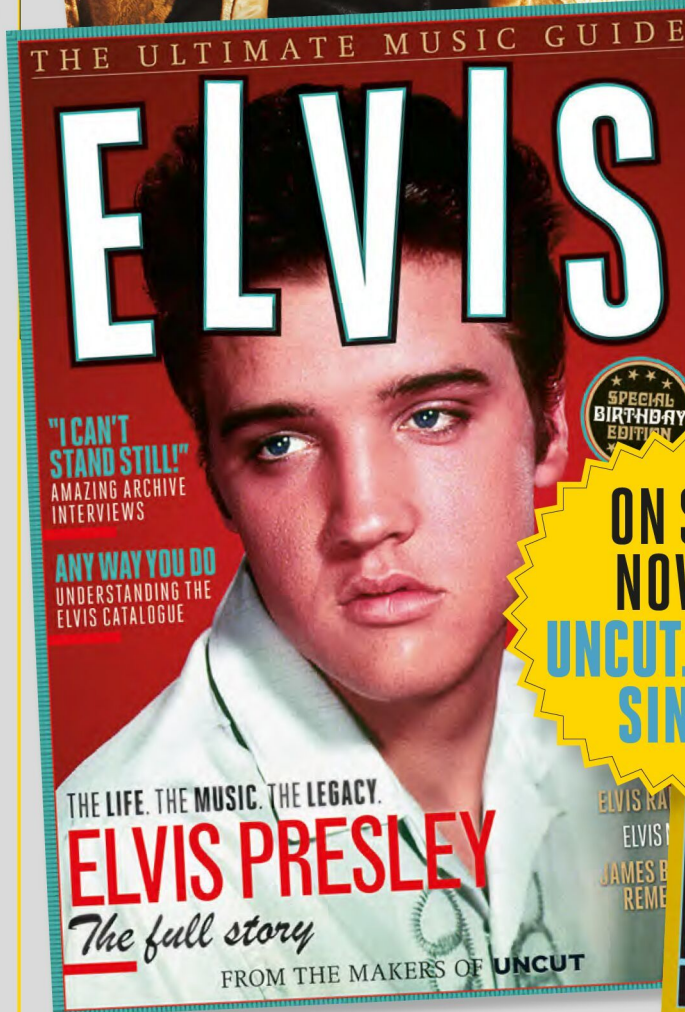
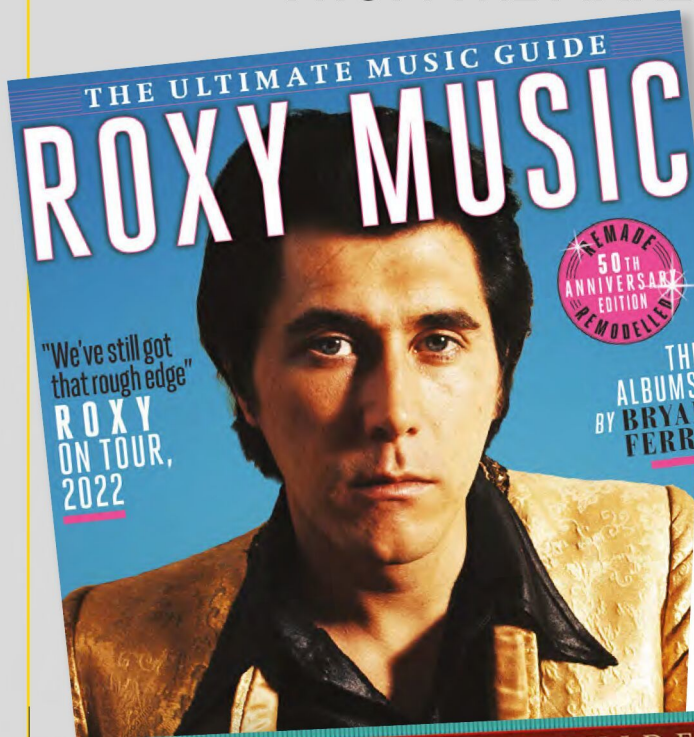
horns blaring passing each other at speed occupies their creative energy for a great deal of time.

At one point the stage lights came on and we could actually see what the band looked like. Guess what, Ralf had white shoes – it was like something out of *Goodbye To Berlin*. I thought at first that they were spats.

"Autobahn" is in fact German surfing music. If Hawkwind are the Michael Moorcock end of space rock, then Kraftwerk are closer to Asimov with their clinical equipment and neon stage lights. ▲ MILES

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07_TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS

ALL ABOARD! HAVE YOUR TICKETS READY FOR A FAINTLY NOSTALGIC ALBUM ABOUT IDENTITY AND TRAINS. DAVID BOWIE SHOWS UP WITH IGGY POP AND SCHUBERT. BY DAVID QUANTICK

RELEASED: MARCH 1977

IT'S a fanfare, announcing an arrival. It's one of the classic popular music intros, the sound of a song that's champing at the bit to get going, like the ascending chords on "Let's Dance" and "Twist And Shout". It's an "All aboard!" like the intro to James Brown's "Night Train" or "Magical Mystery Tour". It's all of those things and more (and it's not even the first song on the record) because "Trans-Europe Express" is much more than another Kraftwerk travel song, it's an invitation to go on a journey. *Trans-Europe Express*, like the best Kraftwerk concept albums, is only half a concept album: one half deals with identity and dehumanisation and the other is about taking a trip on a train (perhaps it's this that makes *TEE* textured like its sister album, *The Man-Machine*, rather than a bit relentless like their successors). If you're into albums that are only half about trains, this is the one for you!

Trans-Europe Express was the first Kraftwerk album to harness experimentation to a new rigorous consistency. No more flute pieces in among the eulogies to technology, no more digressions into classical music and no more wrong haircuts: this new Kraftwerk, anticipating the new wave and the '80s, were uniform and uniformed, looking backwards and forwards at the same time like a quartet of droll Januses. From now on, every Kraftwerk album, every Kraftwerk song – every Kraftwerk sound – would be rigorously controlled and vetted before it was sent out into the world.

In 1977, the world had no idea about any of this; but they were about to. With a proper launch

party – on a train, of course – and a wave of press interviews, Kraftwerk were able to put across the manifesto they'd finalised. Machines and humans should and would synthesise. Organic life and mechanical life were closer than we thought. We are showroom dummies. And it was all done with mordant, often misunderstood humour (David Bowie said that when he told Florian Schneider about how the previous owner of his new Mercedes had been assassinated, Schneider replied, "Ja, car always lasts longer").

Trans-Europe Express is the first flowering of Kraftwerk's fully realised concept, the "holistic vision" they had been reaching for. There may not be direct links between tracks as disparate as "Franz Schubert" and "Showroom Dummies", but they connected to a central idea, and that idea was Kraftwerk themselves, who – like the train they eulogised for 14 thrilling minutes – were both futuristic and traditional, high-tech and old European. They were the stars losing their identities in the mirror, they were the infinite story of Europe, and they were the straight-faced mannequins breaking out of confinement to – what else? – dance. (Unlike their imitators, Kraftwerk were always intentionally funny, and "Showroom Dummies" is hilarious, especially in French.)

We often call Kraftwerk's sound "futuristic", because it is futuristic: they used sequencers and synthesisers to create new sounds and rhythms, and often wrote about futuristic concepts. But in their music – again unlike their dystopia-obsessed imitators – there is a great deal of nostalgia, and for a German band in 1977, nostalgia was a tricky topic, with the taint of Nazism still prevalent in living memory.

Kraftwerk's backward-looking songs about autobahns and radios and their nostalgic sleeve photos alluded to an idealised past; and why not? Helping to create a new version of Germany is one of the band's recognised achievements. On *Trans-Europe Express*, they were able to place their homeland's revived culture at the heart of a continent that (West) Germany was now an important part of.

The album begins with "Europe Endless", a beautiful intro that's part systems music and part dance-floor stomper. Ralf Hütter sings of "elegance and decadence" in a Europe

where "life is timeless". It's a gorgeous, gliding song that harks to the past while sounding like the future (and those choral synths make it sound like past and future at the same time). The song circles itself and loops around as endlessly as its title (and, like the ouroboros, will return to eat

FOR A GERMAN
BAND IN 1977,
NOSTALGIA
WAS STILL A
TRICKY TOPIC
DUE TO THE
TAINT OF NAZISM



the album later) and its imagery of an imperial Europe of "parks, hotels and palaces" is saved from grandiosity by the simplicity of the melody and instrumentation. Its slightly odd but exciting mix of melancholy and celebration leads nicely into the next track, "Hall Of Mirrors", a song that takes its name from the famous Galerie Des Glaces in the Palace Of Versailles, but is concerned less with the age of Louis XIV than the distorting nature of fame. An ominous beat provided by the echoing slap of footsteps and a slow, glittering coda perfectly suit a lyric in which "even the greatest stars/ Lose themselves in the looking glass". Later aptly covered by the queen of spook, Siouxsie Sioux, "Hall Of Mirrors" is a cold Gothic classic, Kraftwerk's own picture of Dorian Gray. It's the first of Kraftwerk's great identity songs – which is the real me, me or my reflection? – and it's followed by the, um, second of Kraftwerk's great identity songs.

Introduced with a count-in that's a Ramones reference if you're mad, "Showroom Dummies" is Kraftwerk's first funny song (although it's hard to tell if "We're standing here/Exposing ourselves" is deliberate innuendo) about a group of shop dummies who achieve sentience, move around for a bit, then smash the store windows and... go to a disco (Kraftwerk loved dancing in clubs, so this latter part makes a good deal of sense). It's something of a contrast to "Hall Of Mirrors"'s seriousness, to say the least, and it's the first appearance of the super-dry sense of humour that runs through "The Model", "Pocket Calculator" and the best Kraftwerk singles.

And that, as they say, is just Side One. Three remarkable, and remarkably different tracks, all excellent and groundbreaking, but as nothing to the epic tune that takes up most of Side Two. Kraftwerk have always been known for making brilliant pieces of music that celebrate both technology and movement as well as the

symbiosis between man and (you're ahead of me here) machine. Motorways! Trains! Spacelabs! And, um, bicycles! (quite a lot of bicycles: Kraftwerk may secretly be huge fans of *The Third Policeman*, in which Flann O'Brien outlines his own theory of man-machine symbiosis).

"Trans-Europe Express" is one of Kraftwerk's great achievements, nearly a quarter of an hour of extraordinary mesmeric and inventive pop music, that builds on the musical ideas introduced with "Autobahn" and streamlines them into an even more inventive song, with that great riff – stolen, as every fule kno, by the nascent electro scene in New York – and that insanely literal train rhythm. Two

minutes in, and the song providing all the urgency, Hütter begins one of the most languid vocals of his career: "Rendezvous on Champs-Élysées/ Leave Paris in the morning on TEE." It's an itinerary song, essentially, with one of the best namedrops in popular music history when Hütter delivers what can only be called a shout-out to both his hometown and two of his mates: "From station to station back to Düsseldorf City/ Meet Iggy Pop and David Bowie." And then, if six minutes of this extraordinary song weren't enough, off it goes into "Metal On Metal", a section that on its own introduces a new concept, industrial

"TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS" IS ONE OF KRAFTWERK'S GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The album's most wayward moments are reserved for 'Showroom Dummies'. Another Can-ish track, its words relate the Dr Who-style awakening of tailors' models in a shop front and their subsequent jerkings around town. Sparse percussives and ultra-rhythmic keyboards reinforce the sense of unease. '...Dummies' alone makes most of Iggy's *The Idiot* seem like candy fluff in comparison." ANGUS MACKINNON, NME, MAY 28, 1977



The Metropolis-referencing model from the "Trans-Europe Express" video, 1977



music. The interweaving of sound effects, percussion and music here was the first inkling that Kraftwerk really might be telling the truth when they said they were the robots: the whole thing is seamless and remains a highlight of both this album and Kraftwerk's self-tribute live shows (and the bit where the train goes into the tunnel isn't bad either). Note, also, the Morse code riff that runs through "Abzug" (departure) and the wobbly synths, adding both urgency and spook to the track.



Kling Klang every trip: Kraftwerk toast the launch of *Trans-Europe Express* with a beer binge, France, March 1977

TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS'S title song finally leaves us in a fanfare of steam and screeching brakes, but the journey ain't done yet. After all this clatter of metal and relentless machinery, it's time for "Franz Schubert", a piece that – while being entirely electronic – seems to reference an older, almost forgotten Kraftwerk that played classical-style music on real instruments. It's a gorgeous piece with a minimal melody that seems to waft in through the windows, nostalgic and from tomorrow at the same time, a tribute to the great 19th-century songwriter and composer that sounds both nothing like his aching laments and yet is just like them, go figure. Schubert is of course a very European figure from the Altkultur and his placement here works perfectly as throwback to and lead into "Endless Endless", the first and last track here, which echoes away in a vocodered loop...

And there you have it, 43 minutes of music the like of which nobody had ever heard before. Other bands, many of them German, had used synthesizers in new and exciting ways, but none of them had had the sheer – this word again – holistic vision of Kraftwerk, uniting image with invention and visuals with sound. Kraftwerk were a self-created item – around this time they decided to avoid drink and drugs, get their hair cut, and never work with people who weren't them – and on *Trans-Europe Express* they found a way to be the whole shemuzzle, a band who dressed how they sounded, sounded how they felt, and felt the way they dressed.

Before *Trans-Europe Express*, there was a fluidity, an uncertainty about Kraftwerk: the band had begun their career as a duo, named after their two members, and then, settling on a name, had taken a painstaking route of self-discovery. Early records were unsure if they were celebrating technology or – like the thunderous, ponderous progressive bands in England and America – just mixing classical music with something else. Increasingly, the band fixated on a unified image that complemented a unified sound, and *TEE* is the first uncluttered expression of that new sound and vision. They would never again make a record where they didn't look and sound like four minds working, playing and thinking in unison, and where not every song was yoked to a central concept.

But all this was only seeded here, not fully expressed, and back in 1977 – itself a year of supershifting musical and social currents – Kraftwerk were different, so different that they wouldn't have a hit with their old songs

until five years later. But unknown to the critics who made bad WWII jokes and talked about their lack of soul, Kraftwerk had just unveiled their vision for the rest of their career, and others. Very few records have given the world a new direction for music, but *Trans-Europe Express* managed to throw out at least four. The new rock music that Bowie would soon co-opt and take his own way. The synth-pop that would dominate the British charts in the early '80s – and, via a video-starved MTV, change American popular music for good. The industrial sounds of Einstürzende Neubauten, peak Depeche Mode and then Nine Inch Nails. And the electro beats of Afrika Bambaata and the New York rap scene.

People talk lightly of records that changed the world, and generally they mean something vague about hairstyles, but if asked to name one record that really did, acting both as a crystal ball and a mirror, then *Trans-Europe Express* should be at the top of anyone's list. It's a masterpiece in anyone's book, past, present and future. ☸

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS. TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS.....

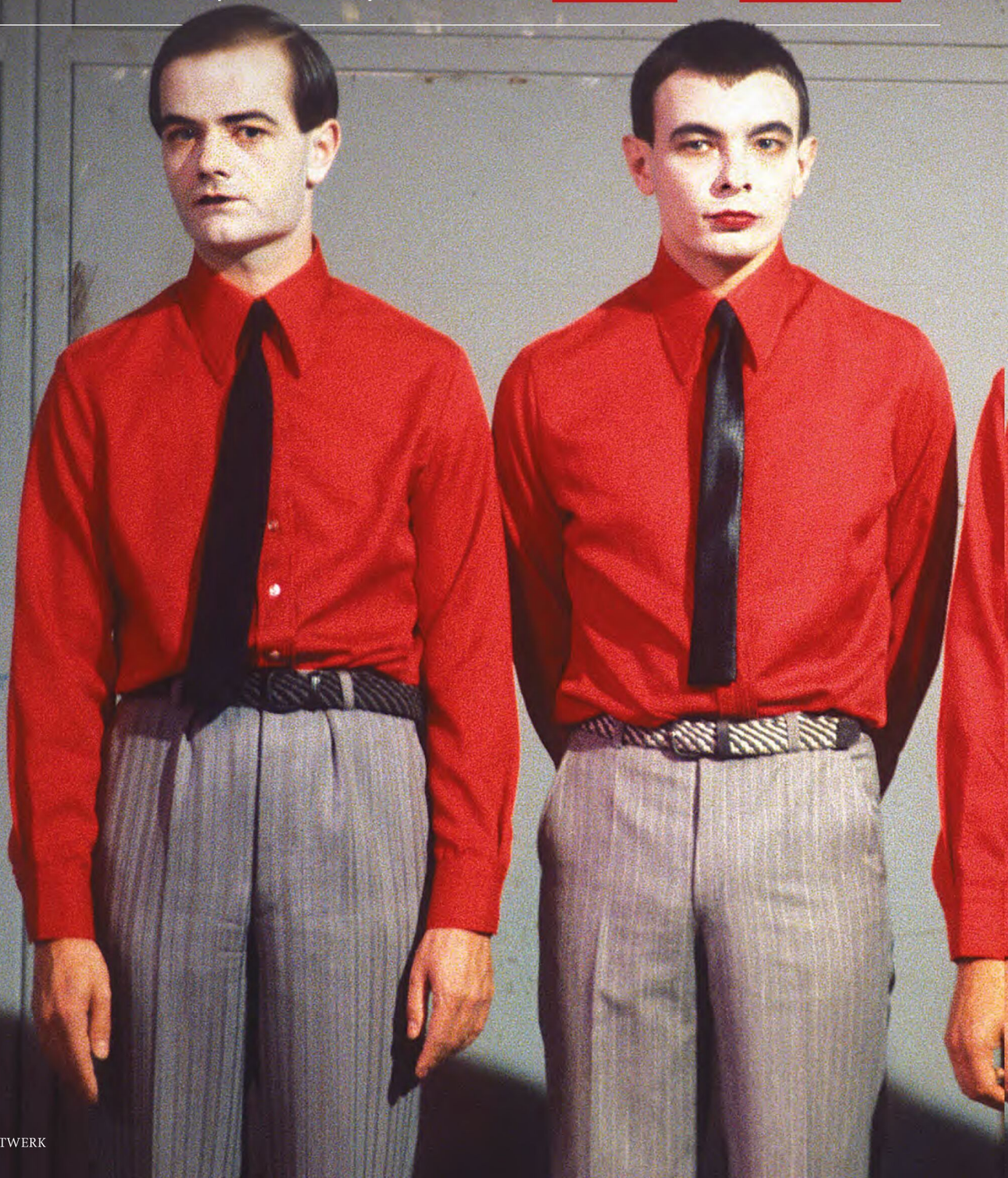
1. Europe Endless*****
2. The Hall Of Mirrors*****
3. Showroom Dummies*****
4. Trans-Europe Express*****
5. Metal On Metal*****
6. Abzug*****
7. Franz Schubert*****

8. Endless Endless*****
LABEL: Kling Klang
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang; Rüssli Studio, Record Plant
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (voice,

synthesiser, orchestra, synthanorma-sequencer, electronics), Florian Schneider (voice, vocoder, vocatraz, synthesiser, electronics)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
 UK 49; US 119

"TOP THIS, GIORGIO MORODER"

Kraftwerk prank the European rock press with a high-altitude Parisian playback of their new album *The Man-Machine*. The confluence of *Metropolis*, robots, and vodka prove nearly too much for ANDY GILL and ALLAN JONES



NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS APRIL 29, 1978



THE terminal building at Charles de Gaulle Airport is a large concrete doughnut, the only non-artificial light coming from the central hole, where windows overlook a collection of perspex-and-metal transport tubes traversing the hole at varying angles and directions, connecting different floors of the doughnut.

The effect is evocative of the overground city in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and for that matter, of an old promo shot from Kling Klang Verlag, Kraftwerk's music company. The irony is impossible to ignore.

The ostensible reason for holding the "premiere" of Kraftwerk's new album, *The Man-Machine*, in Paris is that Kraftwerk are big in France – big to the tune of 350,000 copies of *Trans-Europe Express*, in fact – so a motley collection of media people, liggers, record company people and New Europeans in general has been shuttled there to attend the band's intriguingly titled "Soiree Rouge".

Red, you see, is the dominant colour motif in *The Man-Machine*, corresponding to conceptual overtones of revolution and totalitarianism. Suffice to say, for the moment, that the reverse-printing of the letter "R" on the chic invitation is less a typographical error than an intentional Russian connotation.

The soiree is held at a penthouse club called Le Ciel De Paris (The Sky Of Paris), literally the highest point in the city where 300 people can be fitted – a cool 56 floors up.

The first thing you notice about the place is the lights. Dozens of red lights, some set on tripods, some mounted atop the banks of speakers in the corners, others strategically scattered around the room. As yet, they're dormant.

A home-movie screen is set up at one end of the place, and there's a video projector facing another screen along one wall. Next to the video screen is an alcove, presumably used by go-go dancers in the natural course of events, but tonight housing life-size dummies of the band, neatly attired in red shirts, dark slacks and



Mannequin
machinations:
Kraftwerk in
September 1978



Ralf Hütter at the promotional party for *The Man-Machine* in New York, April 6, 1978



black ties adorned by a sequence of tiny red lights, standing behind various items of Kraftwerkian instrumentation. The effect is, to say the least, disconcerting.

The emphasis on red, however, doesn't extend to the food: there's no scarlet version of Des Esseintes' black dinner, only canapes with caviar and the like, and vodka to wash it down. Needless to say, I pass up the solid and stick to the liquid.

After a short while, the machines are set to work: first off, the album starts playing, accompanied by the synchronised lights. The cine-projector is set in motion – *Metropolis*, of course – and things start to get a trifle uncomfortable. The music's loud – too loud for easy conversation; and everywhere you look, there's one of those red lights shining directly in your eyes. There's even one over the video screen, for Christ's sake, making it impossible to view the damn thing.

Kraftwerk have set up (probably quite deliberately) an alienating, oppressive environment with their beloved machines. A sensory assault course. The effect of the lights, for instance, is to force you to look at the ground. The sight of a roomful of bowed heads invited comparison with the ranks of workers in *Metropolis*; and, ironically, it's the cool overground set who are being forced to bow, alienated by 55 floors of power and prestige from the plebs below.

Periodically, the video shows a promo film for "We Are The Robots", the album's opening cut and probable single. Like the rest of the album, it's unrelenting

electronic disco mekanik of the state-of-the-art, top-this-Giorgio Moroder variety. The film uses neat juxtaposition of dummies and humans, incorporating a "showroom dummies" dance and some quite disturbing super imposition of singing human lips on dummy heads. A cut above the average mug-shot stuff, it'd be great on *Top Of The Pops*.

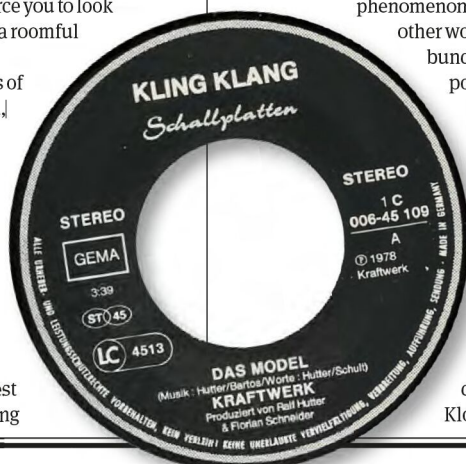
A large number of "Soiree Rouge" inmates seem to be French punks acting out their ideas of le style punk, which from the look of things are gleaned from *Ritz* magazine. The phonetic gesticulation of the French language stands as evidence aplenty of their mania for style; emphasis is placed more on the veneer of behaviour and fashion than on any possible ideological elements a phenomenon may contain. In other words, they're a bunch of shallow poseurs, in the face of which one can only find recourse to mild jingoist banter.

The advance promotion for the album shows red shirts and black ties, so of course there's a whole crowd of Kraftwerk Klones wearing just

that. *Mes chers*, I just didn't know where to put my face when the band finally arrived dressed to a man in black shirts and red ties! I shall never be able to hold my head up at le salon punk again!

Kraftwerk, of course, are bound by the constraints of their image; Ralf looks serious, Florian smirks, and Karl and Wolfgang smile ingratiatingly. Under the circumstances, all save small talk is impossible, and conversation is pretty limited. I'm rather disappointed, as it happens, that they actually appeared in person at all. Surely the artificial representation (dummies, film, tape) would have been more in keeping with their Futurist tendencies?

As the vodka runs out, so does the evening's momentum. The band seem bored. So do all bar the hardcore liggers. The silent Russian film which follows *Metropolis* alienates all but the occasional drunk cinephile who can understand French subtitles, and things gradually grind to a halt. By the time we leave, the dummy Ralf's flies are undone, and the dummy Florian's strides are round his ankles. The effect is, to say the least, amusing.





"From station to station..." launching sixth studio album *Trans-Europe Express*, May 1977

MELODY MAKER APRIL 22, 1978



THURSDAY: to Paris by airbus (we hit every rumour of turbulence between Heathrow and the Continent) for an appointment with Kraftwerk, our favourite Germans. Florian, Ralf, Karl and Wolfgang – such cute names – we had been thrilled to learn earlier in the week, had recently completed a brand new album, the deftly titled *The Man-Machine*, and they really wanted us to hear it.

This evening it is to be premiered at a reception on – hey, dig this, Siegfried! – the 56th floor of the Montparnasse Tower; a steel and concrete monstrosity that leaps from the synthetic rubble of a downtown shopping precinct (all escalators and brightly coloured plastic dustbins) to give God the finger.

Oh well – we supposed when we accepted the invitation – it beats all those drab receptions in seedy London wine bars of which Virgin seems

presently enamoured (all cheap white wine and peanuts – you know the scene).

Les Press Anglais arrive in Montparnasse in a cute little minibus (ridiculous! where was the limo?) which we have been persuaded to share with a gang of giggling foreigners.

We were suffering from an acute attack of xenophobia (not as severe as that which afflicts Lee Brilleaux, but bad enough). We wouldn't speak to any of them, so we shall never know whether they were Belgian hacks flown in for the binge or representatives from EMI's Paris office. But who the hell cares? In the immortal words of Brilleaux, they're all f-dashing collaborators.

We take the elevator: 56 floors in less than 10 seconds, with our mouths clenched tight to keep our stomachs on the right side of our teeth.

Whooooosh. Made it. We clamber out and file into the reception.

Wonderful. They're serving only vodka and

caviar. The caviar lasts for maybe 15 minutes as the Continental hacks and media personalities mount a cavalry charge at the supplies.

The vodka survives for not much longer. The French contingent, looking severely dated in their surrogate bondage strides and ripped-and-torn punk ensembles, whack down copious quantities when it's available. It's of an even more cruel vintage than the stuff that caused such disasters to Nick Lowe's equilibrium in

Finland, and soon these continental Johnnies are staggering about the premises with their eyes double glazed and their legs buckling beneath them.

EVERYWHERE
YOU LOOK,
THERE'S ONE OF
THOSE RED LIGHTS
SHINING DIRECTLY
IN YOUR EYES



WOLFGANG
AND KARL
LOOK LIKE
DIRK BOGARDE
IN VISCONTI'S
THE DAMNED

Slap and travel:
Kraftwerk
adopt Welmar
chic for the
"Trans-Europe
Express" single
promo, 1977

Shocking behaviour on the part of our hosts, we thought as they barged into us, babbling incoherently in that curious manner peculiar to the French when they're either drunk or excited. Anglo-French relations are, we might say, critically tested in the circumstances; but we remain successfully aloof and naturally superior.

The evening's entertainment is limited. We are amused by the lighting. Low-key strobes flicker hysterically, enhancing the intimate mood and bemusing our senses. Revolving red lamps suggest that the local gendarmes are mounting a dramatic raid. (What, I wondered, was the French for "eat everything?")

We are similarly taken by the Showroom Dummy display. I refer, of course, to the mannequin replicas of Kraftwerk mounted on a small stage, uncannily accurate models of Florian, Ralf, Karl and old Wolfgang, dressed in the natty threads in which they appear, apparently, in the sleeve portrait of the new platter.

The tapes of this very record begin to roll; droll heartbeats and electronic pulses droning through the gloom. Jackboot jive for the new age. Metal machine essays; the soundtrack for an afternoon teabreak at Krupp's.

Whispers from the grave. Fun music, you dig?

Two sides of this and we were almost off to invade Poland. Czechoslovakia, here we come! We began to hum, echoing Lenny Bruce. Suicide are made to sound positively jaunty and carefree by comparison. The vocals creep through like an announcement of disaster



over a Tannoy at hell's deserted airport.

Marvellously spooky vibes, though; insidious communication that rings the front door bell and races through the kitchen window when your back's turned. The French are really grooving, but what can you expect from a nation that not only built the Maginot Line to stop the Germans (who, cleverly, merely tramped *around* it), but also idolises Sean Tyla?

There's a cut on the new album called "Metropolis", after the Fritz Lang movie. Inevitably, it's shown. Several times. I've always preferred *The Big Heat*, if only for the scene where Lee Marvin chucks a pot of scalding coffee over Gloria Grahame (she returns the compliment in the final reel). Still, it's amusing to reflect on the fact that all the proles in the flick look like members of Devo.

The Ohio nutters are all brought to mind when

we're treated to a video of Kraftwerk performing a snappy item entitled – if memory serves with any accuracy – "Der Roboter". Minimal choreography and no room for a smile. Moving lips superimposed over the blank features of those ubiquitous dummies. Are we not men? We are Kraftwerk, and we don't care. Watcha, Heinrich! The Huns clock in about two hours after the vodka trickles out.

They're dressed almost identically in black, neatly pressed trousers, black Bri-Nylon pullovers (V-neck, naturally). Their hair – I almost typed "herr" – is shorn in the style of the military and slicked back. They smile as often as it snows in Abu Dhabi.

They troop in, dancing a precise two-step: I look for the clockwork keys between their shoulder blades.

We are introduced. Conversation is out of the question. *The Man-Machine* is back on the tape deck. Boomchickaboom chickaadraaang chickaaboontickaerangrboommaete. The strobes are flashing like epileptic semaphore signals to the greenbelt. The bloody French are falling over themselves trying to dance.

Wolfgang and Karl look like Dirk Bogarde in Visconti's *The Damned*. Ralf looks like a Teutonic BP Fallon. Florian reminds me of Kenneth Mars, the Nazi author of *Springtime For Hitler* in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*. I say hello. He nods his head sharply. He doesn't click his heels.

But it's a close thing.

Then we all go home.

It had been a tiring Thursday. ▲

Meet Iggy Pop and David Bowie...

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08 THE MAN-MACHINE

THE RISE OF THE ROBOTS. SCI-FI CITYSCAPES AND BIO-TECH MARRIAGES ABOUND AS POP'S FUTURE IS PREPROGRAMMED BY THE *METROPOLIS* HOUSE BAND. BY STEPHEN DALTON

RELEASED: MAY 19, 1978

LAUNCHED with a bizarre playback party atop a modernist French skyscraper, where robotic showroom dummies stood in for the band, *The Man-Machine* left the rock media bewildered by Kraftwerk's latest revolutionary leap forward in metal machine music. But Ralf and Florian's seventh record would prove hugely influential, shaping much of the pop-media landscape for the decade ahead.

After the sepia-tinted analogue nostalgia of *Radio-Activity* and *Trans-Europe Express*, *The Man-Machine* took a more vividly colourful contemporary turn, drawing on the past but also looking ahead to a dawning digital future of music as synthetic spectacle and pop stars as robotic clones. Do androids dream of illicit romance with their human masters? What is the function of art in an age of mechanical reproduction? If the world predicted by *The Man-Machine* no longer feels quite so shockingly new, that may be because we are living in it now.

Kraftwerk's career-long game plan to transform themselves into a living artwork made a significant advance with *The Man-Machine*. Photographed by Günther Fröhling and with typographical design by Karl Klefisch, the album's striking sleeve image featured the Düsseldorf quartet dressed in militaristic red-and-black uniforms. This paid knowing homage to the Soviet Russian supremacist artist El Lissitzky, but it also drew on the sexually subversive camp of Germany's pre-war Weimar Republic. The Communist overtones were deliberate; the Nazi undertones less so but still inescapable. Life is a totalitarian cabaret, old chum.

Honed from extended sequencer jams that sometimes ran for several days in Kraftwerk's secluded Kling Klang studio base, the six expansive tracks on *The Man-Machine* elegantly fuse form and function. The music uses speech synthesisers, drum machines and bespoke electronics while the lyrics address an increasingly high-tech society of automation and alienation. Over supple processed rhythms that draw on late 1970s Eurodisco and lay the groundwork for 1980s synthpop, these precision-tooled melodies anticipate a world in which humans and machines are not enemies but willing bedfellows. "There is an interaction on both sides," Florian Schneider told *Starlog* magazine in October 1978. "The machine helps the man, and the man admires the machine... As for ourselves, we love our machines. We have an erotic relationship with them."

Significantly, *The Man-Machine* is the first Kraftwerk album to feature full songwriter credits for Karl Bartos, the classically trained percussionist who first joined the band for the *Autobahn* tour of America in 1975. Although Ralf Hütter would later downplay the contributions of Bartos and fellow new recruit Wolfgang Flür, Kraftwerk's youngest, hippest member brought a new cultural richness and pop sensibility to the quartet's compositions, borrowing as much from American R&B as the European avant-garde.

THE MAN-MACHINE is bookended with two classic, monumental Kraftwerk anthems. It opens with "The Robots", a future live staple that would come to define the band's aloof android image for decades to come. Emerging from a luminous flurry of weightless bleeps and bleeps, like a computer booting up, the song's deadpan synthetic vocal dances along to nimble keyboard melody and a sequenced funk groove punctuated by metallic clangs and precisely tapered glitches.

The song's repeated Russian refrain "Я твой слуга (*Ya tvoi sluga*)/Я твой работник (*Ya tvoi rabotnik*)" translates into English as "I'm your slave, I'm your worker", lending wry ambiguity to its gleaming futurism with a sly nod to Soviet Marxist theories about forging new types of men for a new society, as echoed in the album sleeve.

Hütter's latter-day fondness for describing Kraftwerk as "musical workers" rather than bourgeois individualist artists, however ironic or fanciful, reinforces this notion. "The point of view of the 19th century is over," he told *Rock & Folk*

magazine in June 1978. "The myth of the important artist has been overexploited. It doesn't fit any more with the standards of modern society. Today, mass production rules."

The stately, mechanised funk processional of "The Man-Machine" itself, which closes the album, returns to this theme of humans as

YOUNGEST
MEMBER BARTOS
BROUGHT A NEW
POP SENSIBILITY
TO THE
COMPOSITIONS



robots, lending it an ominous Nietzschean twist with its croaky Mysterion-voiced “*superhuman being*” refrain. But the song’s sinister edge is dampened by its mellifluously stacked vocal harmonies, which sound like a cyborg Beach Boys in action. Fun fun fun.

For all its chilly futurism, *The Man-Machine* also contains some of Kraftwerk’s most dreamy and sensual melodies. The album’s softly beating heart is “Neon Lights”, a sublime lullaby hymning the tinselly beauty of the nocturnal city. As Hütter’s plaintive vocal fades away, the song extends into a nine-minute electronic reverie of shimmers and ripples, woozy synth sighs and bespoke percussion flourishes. This evocative sound painting went on to enjoy a fertile afterlife as a Kraftwerk karaoke standard, inspiring cover versions by Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Simple Minds, U2, Luna and others.

The most un-Kraftwerk track on *The Man-Machine* is also the most straightforward pop ditty. A rare combination of storytelling lyric and snappy melody, “The Model” trains a sardonic eye on monetised beauty and the hollow glamour of fame. Co-written by Hütter and Bartos with lyrical help from the band’s frequent collaborator Emil Schult, this deliciously bitter comic vignette was reportedly inspired by fashion model Christa Becker, although Hütter later denied this, claiming it wasn’t based on anybody. “It’s about the context of an object, paying money: for beauty we will pay,” he told *Uncut* in 2009.

The German-language version of “The Model” was initially only released as a single domestically, but it later became one of Kraftwerk’s most beloved international calling cards by a bizarre twist of fate. After being rediscovered by radio DJs on the B-side of the band’s 1981 single “Computer Love”, it was reissued as an A-side and topped the British charts, selling more than half a million copies and making *The Man-Machine* a belated Top 10 hit album.

The Man-Machine also finds Kraftwerk flirting with the machine-driven Eurodisco sound pioneered by fellow German producers Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, notably on their groundbreaking Donna Summer tracks “I Feel Love” and “Love to Love You”. The album’s most Moroder-esque track is “Spacelab”, a pulsing, silvery sequencer glide whose ultra-minimal vocal sounds like an early prototype for the Auto-Tune machine. And “Metropolis” is a gleaming, throbbing slab of disco-tronica that references the classic Fritz Lang sci-fi film that screened at the Paris launch party. “We were very much influenced by the futuristic silent films of Fritz Lang,” Hütter told *Future* magazine. “We feel that we are the sons of that type of science-fiction cinema... Historically, we feel that if there was a music group in *Metropolis*, maybe Kraftwerk would have been that band.”

Once they completed recording *The Man-Machine* at their King Klang headquarters in

early 1978, Kraftwerk mixed the album with Joschko Rudas at his more technologically advanced Düsseldorf studio. The band also took the rare step of calling on American studio engineer Leonard Jackson after seeing his name credited alongside Norman Whitfield, the legendary Motown writer and producer best known for his work with The Temptations and Marvin Gaye.

According to some accounts, Jackson flew into Germany knowing nothing about Kraftwerk, and fully expecting to meet a black disco band. Shocked by the unusually severe Düsseldorf winter, with temperatures plunging to minus 17 degrees, his input on the album proved minimal. Kraftwerk would later have a seminal impact on hip-hop, techno and house music, but their sole direct experiment with African-American R&B fell flat.

THE MAN-MACHINE PROVED CRUCIAL IN SHAPING BOTH THE SOUND AND LOOK OF NASCENT NEW WAVE

FOLLOWING the gimmicky robotic debacle of the high-rise Paris launch party, press reviews for *The Man-Machine* were mixed, but generally positive. In Britain, the album earned Kraftwerk their first cover of the *New Musical Express*, despite the band stubbornly refusing to pose for fresh photos, a defiant stance that would harden into firm policy for decades afterwards. Some writers inevitably queried the totalitarian associations of the cover image, but most picked up on the album’s sly humour and sleek disco undertow.

“*The Man-Machine* stands as one of the pinnacles of ’70s rock music,” gushed Andy Gill in *NME*. “Musically the album combines the inexorability of *Trans-Europe Express* with the rhythmic intensity more usually associated with Giorgio Moroder, although it’s worth noting that Kraftwerk were

THE CRITICS’ VERDICT

“Musically the album combines the inexorability of ‘Trans-Europe Express’ with the rhythmic intensity more usually associated with Giorgio Moroder – although it’s worth noting that Kraftwerk were experimenting with such rhythms long before ‘I Feel Love’.”
ANDY GILL, *NME*,
APRIL 29, 1978

“With 1984 only six short years away, the future that their music seems to predict has been here and gone. 2001 is already in the past, and the high-rise towers of ‘Metropolis’ have become a weed-grown and graffiti-splattered *Clockwork Orange* nightmare.”
KARL DALLAS,
MELODY MAKER,
MAY 5, 1978



experimenting with such rhythms long before ‘I Feel Love’.”

American reviewers were less convinced.

Writing in *Rolling*

Stone, Mitchell Schneider branded *The Man-Machine* “exquisite torture... a sound so antiseptic that germs would die there”. Even so, Schneider conceded there was beauty behind the banality. “For all its chilling restraint and relentless sameness, the compositions here are often strangely pleasant in an otherworldly way. Probably because of Kraftwerk’s sheer audacity, the overall effect is simultaneously frightening and funny.”

The Man-Machine proved a modest chart hit for Kraftwerk, cracking the Top 20 in Germany and



Uniform brilliance: Kraftwerk pose for the cover of *The Man-Machine*

France, although it barely registered across the Atlantic. The album later climbed to Number 9 in Britain, earning gold disc status with 100,000-plus sales on the back of its accidental chart-topping single "The Model". But its enduring legacy was more cultural than commercial. Arriving in the post-punk Year Zero of 1978, *The Man-Machine* proved crucial in shaping both the sound and look of nascent New Wave with its dressed-down, short-haired, skinny-tied, future-facing, empathically anti-rock aesthetic. It rebooted the lexicon of pop for the post-guitar era, replacing outmoded romantic notions of superhuman rock stars with more egalitarian notions of musicians as studio robots and sonic scientists. As Hütter told *Starlog*, "Kraftwerk's sound is hard to comprehend because it goes beyond musical categories. It doesn't fit into the

guitar-hero culture. I think our music has more to do with science, science fiction or futurism than with traditional musicianship."

Crucially, *The Man-Machine* showcased the potential of electronic pop just as cheaper synthesisers and drum machines began hitting the market. 1978 also saw Devo's debut album,

Daniel Miller's milestone electro-punk single "Warm Leatherette", Gary Numan's first Tubeway Army releases, and Ultravox record their synth-heavy *Systems Of Romance* with former Kraftwerk producer Conny Plank. The Human League, Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark and Yellow Magic Orchestra all formed in 1978, while an embryonic Depeche Mode began slouching towards Basildon to be born. At the end of the year, David Bowie saw The Human League live and declared them "the future of pop music."

According to Kraftwerk folklore, Michael Jackson became obsessed with *The Man-Machine*, contacting the band to request multi-track tapes of the album and discuss a possible collaboration. The ever-evasive Hütter once recalled a bizarre meeting with the troubled pop superstar in a New York building staffed with Jackson clones, but he later denied this encounter ever took place.

The Man-Machine remains a game-changing career milestone for Kraftwerk. The title track has long been the opening signature tune of their hugely successful 3D live show, with "The Model" and "The Robots" also firmly established fixtures. The band only realised their dream of having their animated android selves perform on stage decades later, but the concept was first discussed in 1978. The album's iconic red-and-black uniform has also been referenced in Kylie and Beck videos, made jokey cameos in *Father Ted* and *The Big Lebowski*, and even seems to have inspired Ant and Dec's current advertising campaign for Santander.

Generations of electronic performers have also riffed on the album's android aesthetic: from Gary Numan to Squarepusher, Model 500 to Björk, Janelle Monáe to Daft Punk. Karl Bartos even went on to collaborate with second-generation Kraftwerk fans after he finally left the band in 1990, including Andy McCluskey of OMD and Bernard Sumner's techno-rock collective Electronic. As relations with his former bandmates cooled, Bartos mischievously recycled his robotic dummy image for the cover of his 2013 album *Off The Record*, and paid winking homage to *The Man-Machine* on tracks like "Neon Piano" and "Musica Ex Machina".

In 1978, many found Kraftwerk's seventh album forbiddingly arch, aloof and artificial. More than 40 years later, these serene retro-futurist dreams sound warm and witty, romantic and prophetic. "The machines are part of us and we are part of the machines," Hütter told *Starlog*. "They play with us and we play with them. We are brothers. They are not our slaves. We work together, helping each other to create. People fear losing their humanity to technology. That's nonsense. A human being in contact with a machine becomes more of a human." 🤖

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...THE MAN-MACHINE. THE MAN-MACHINE. THE MAN-MACHINE....

1. The Robots *****
2. Spacelab *****
3. Metropolis *****
4. The Model *****
5. Neon Lights *****
6. The Man-Machine *****

RECORDED AT: Kling Klang, Düsseldorf
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider
PERSONNEL INCLUDES: Ralf Hütter (electronics, keyboards, Orchestron, sequencer,

synthesiser, vocoder, voice), Florian Schneider (electronics, synthesiser, vocoder, Votrax), Karl Bartos (electronic drums), Wolfgang Flür (electronic drums)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK 9; US 130

Downtime for dummies:
Kraftwerk unpack at a
French television studio,
September 16, 1978



"IN FRONT OF THE LOUDSPEAKERS EVERYBODY IS EQUAL"

KRAFTWERK take MELODY MAKER on a cinematic tour of Düsseldorf. From the windowless Kling Klang studios to the cake shop, and ultimately the disco, the trip reveals egalitarian opinions and a surprising amount of ice-cream. "Discotheques are really electronic living rooms," they tell CHRIS PETIT

MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 4, 1978



INSIDE the foyer of the Regina, a cheaper hotel in Düsseldorf. Daytime. LONG SHOT.

K (Florian Schneider) and R (Ralf Hütter) of Kraftwerk meet C.

MEDIUM SHOT of K and K.

TILT from feet to head. K and K are dressed identically except in the smallest details. They wear the same-style pointed black Chelsea shoes (K's are patent leather, however) with hidden gussets and light perforation, silver grey trousers of similar pattern and stripe. K wears a white shirt and K one of the palest grey. The collars are soft and narrow but quite pointed. They wear cufflinks and narrow black ties with small knots and they carry mid-grey V-neck pullovers. Their hair is short, cut level with the top of the ear, and brushed close.

EXTERIOR of the street outside the hotel. Daytime. LONG SHOT. K and K usher C into a Volkswagen convertible whose roof is down. K drives. K sits in the back. The Volkswagen moves down the road and makes a right. Soundtrack: "Sense Of Doubt" from David Bowie.

CAPTION. But isn't all formulation, even of things that happened, more or less a fiction? (Peter Handke) INSIDE the Volkswagen. CLOSE UP of the car radio as K changes from Station to Station.

MEDIUM SHOT of K as he drives.

K: How did you come to Düsseldorf?

C: [off] Trans-Europe Express.

K: [from the back] Straight connections.

CLOSE UP of traffic signals which have numerals not colours.

INSIDE the Volkswagen. TWO MEDIUM SHOTS.

K: They tell you how fast to go...

K: To stay on green all the way.

EXTERIOR of the Volkswagen driving down the street at precisely 50kph on green all the way. SEQUENCE ends when the CAMERA CAR, following, sticks on red. The Volkswagen recedes into the distance.

INSIDE the Volkswagen. Views of city streets in LONG SHOT.

K: Düsseldorf, where the Rhine turns into the Lower Rhine. State capital of North-Rhine-Westphalia... K... With

635,000 inhabitants – nine million within a radius of 50km.

"ALL CATEGORIES ARE FINISHED. AVANT-GARDE. DISCO. ROCK AND FOLK. EVERYTHING"

C: It is cleaner and more prosperous in appearance than England.

K: That is because in winter they say it's too cold to do anything but make money.

C: In the Königsallee...

K: ...Which is not quite one kilometre long and 82 metres wide...

K: ...Shops along one side, offices on the other and a moat in between...

C: ...Everyone looks as though they buy their clothes in the large rich shops they parade in front of.

INSIDE the display window of a shop with Showroom Dummies. One of them smiles. Daytime. LONG SHOT.

K and K are among the passers-by. Soundtrack: "The Secret Life Of Arabia" from David Bowie.

K: A lot of them are imported. From France...

K: ...And Italy. The old wax ones were more lifelike.

INSIDE the cafe. Daytime. LONG SHOT. A large elegant room of small round tea tables with gold legs covered with starched pale-pink cloths. The room is prosperously crowded with elderly well-to-do.

MEDIUM SHOT of K ordering coffee, tea and chocolate. Cakes too. K recommends the cheesecake. The tea arrives. LONG SHOT then various MEDIUM SHOTS.

C: You call yourselves the children of Werner von Braun...

K: We see ourselves less as musicians than as scientists working in a sound laboratory.

C: ...And of Fritz Lang.

K: We have always thought of our music being like a movie...

K: ...Soundtracks.

K: Movie soundtracks.

K orders more tea and cakes and talks of how Fassbinder used Kraftwerk's music in the film *Chinese Roulette*. K asks if C knows *Satan's Brew*, from Fassbinder.

K: A very good satire on the bourgeois concept of the artist...

K: ...As genius rather than technician.

K: A change of scene is required.

EXTERIOR of the parked Volkswagen. Daytime.

CLOSE UP of traffic ticket stuck on windshield.

INSIDE A CINEMA FOYER.

Daytime. LONG SHOT. K and K pick up the month's cinema programme.

INSIDE Kling Klang Studio.

Time: indeterminate. LONG SHOT and PAN around a large room full of electronic equipment, some on

scaffolding. The walls are padded and there are no windows. Racks of different coloured Neon Lights surround the bottom of the walls. Soundtrack: from *Before And After Science* from Eno.

K and K enter and sit on a low sofa of black leather. CLOSE UP. The "record" button of a tape cassette player being pressed down. MEDIUM SHOT of K and K, who talk of the German Futurist Movement of the '20s and how filmmakers like

Fritz Lang in silent movies were achieving with Vision what Sound has managed only decades later.

C: [off] You control all the processes of your work. But your music talks not of autonomy but of automation.

K: This is the age of the Machine...

K: ...We write only of the Zeitgeist.

C: You make no distinction between different kinds of music.

K: In front of the microphone musical styles are no longer separate...

K: ...All categories are finished. Avant-Garde. Disco. Rock and Folk. Everything...

K: Only has to meet the standards of the Industry. 2x20 minutes.

C: Germany, the synthetic crossroads revealed by Kraftwerk to David Bowie, Eno and Iggy Pop, wrote Yves Adrian/Orphan in *Rock & Folk*.

K: We try and communicate via our electronic media...

K: ...We are completely isolated because Düsseldorf is a city of offices, the bureaucratic centre of German industry...

K: ...We don't need to meet everyone in person.

C: From Station to Station back to Düsseldorf City to meet Iggy Pop and David Bowie.

K: We feel telepathic although he is from a very different background...

K: ...We consider ourselves synthetic beings. We cannot speak for him but it certainly shows from his work. He is what we call....

K: ...A liquid personality.

K: ...I think it is called Ch-ch-changes.

CLOSE-UP of the cassette grinding in fits and starts. Stop. Rewind. Playback. The voice is drowned by the machine's groaning.

K: [amused] It makes its own music.

K: We have a machine here that sounds more human than the human voice.

EXTERIOR of streets near the main station. K and K and C walk to buy another tape.

K: Do you know what Abba means in German? It's what small children say when they want to go to the toilet.

C: Did you see the movie?

K: The best 90 minutes of blank screen I've seen.

INSIDE Kling Klang Studio as before.

K: We have always talked of our music in terms of soundtracks for films...

K: ...One day we decided to stop talking about it. We did "Autobahn" and "TEE" on 16mm...

K: ...But we now use video, which we prefer.

K: ...It has an electronic medium where you influence yourself where you work. You

don't have to wait for...

K: ...A couple of days

K: ...While the film is exposed. It's more like...

K: ...Programming and processing...

K: ...That's the way we're used to working.

K: Our films come from everything we cannot communicate with pure sound.

K: One thing about electronic media is that you can do...

K: ...Absolutely anything.



CLOSE-UP. The tape runs out.

INSIDE a large bar on the edge of Altstadt at dusk. MEDIUM SHOT. K and K drink sweet sherry. They are joined by an American in black who looks like she has stepped off the cover of a magazine. Soundtrack: "Negativland" from Neu!

K: orders his second ice-cream of the day.

EXTERIOR of the pavement on Graf-Adolf Strasse and the counter of an ice-cream parlour. Night. LONG SHOT

K: orders his third ice-cream of the day. The others have their first. The American, who looks like she has stepped off the cover of a magazine, decides not to eat alone at the McDonald's next door but to go home.

K: The Japanese say that McDonald's is the worst revenge the Americans could have imposed upon them for losing the war.

INSIDE Kling Klang Studio. 8.30pm. LONG SHOT. K and K are joined by K (Wolfgang Flür) and K (Klaus Röder). Before the day's work begins K and K propose a trip to the Disco for the following evening.

EXTERIOR of the road outside the hotel. 11pm the following night. LONG SHOT. K arrives in a dark Mercedes 600.

INSIDE the Mercedes. MEDIUM SHOT.

K: wears a loose-fitting black leather jacket, a shirt with a dark-blue and white close stripe, open at the neck, and black trousers. K explains to C that they will have a quick bite at a place where they rendezvous with K, who is picking up A, before the Disco. Soundtrack: "V2 Schneider" from David Bowie.

INSIDE a Restaurant on Königsallee. MEDIUM SHOT. K, who wears almost the same as yesterday, arrives with A, who looks like she has stepped off the cover of a magazine. A has fine blonde hair worn back. She wears deep lipstick, a small stole, a black top, a light patterned skirt with a slight flare, dark sheer nylons and black high-heeled shoes.

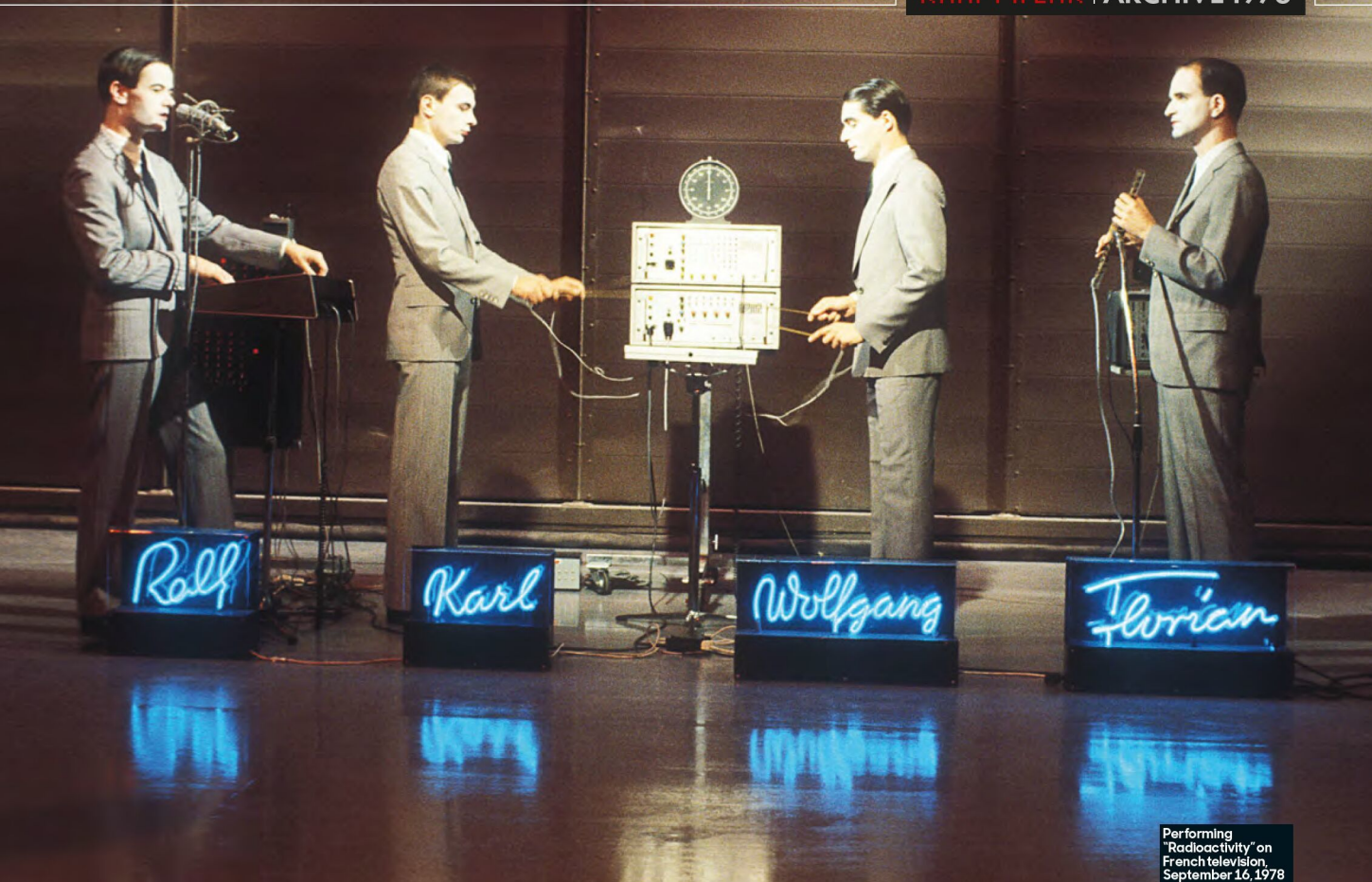
K: In the Discotheque the spotlight is on everybody...

K: ...Unlike concerts where you only see the star of the show and everyone else is in the dark.

K: In Discos everybody can be a part of everybody else. There is something about this we very much like...

K: ...Of course there is good Disco and bad Disco. But it is the exact opposite of our classical music background where you couldn't even...

"WE ARE THE
LINK BETWEEN
THE '20S AND
THE '80S...
OUR REALITY
IS ELECTRONIC"



Performing
"Radioactivity" on
French television,
September 16, 1978

K coughs.

K: ...Or look in your programme...

K: ...Or breathe. Disco should be very loose.

K and K: We consider it the new artform.

K: We also like it because you can go and jump around and it's like some kind of kindergarten.

INSIDE the first Disco. LONG SHOT. A dark-blue room with flickering Neon Lights, a bar and pinball machines. The crowded dancefloor moves to American music.

MEDIUM SHOT of K and K. A plays pinball in the background.

K: Disco developed on the Continent since we had no music live like in the UK and USA. We took from Black Music... the idea of not just listening, but expressing yourself by dancing and jumping around.

CLOSE UP of K: Here in Germany we established a kind of relationship with ...

CLOSE UP OF K: ...With Records, Record Players and Loudspeakers.

CLOSE UP of K: Discotheques are really ELECTRONIC LIVING ROOMS.

MEDIUM SHOT of K and K. In the background, A wins a replay.

K: Disco is the electronic artform. We like to create sounds in this form not only because it is very "mechanical" but because it is a THREE-DIMENSIONAL LIFESTYLE.

K: Like a living room where everyone shares the same rhythms and vibrations. It is Environmental Music.

MEDIUM SHOT of A. playing pinball. A. plays well, lazily flicking the ball at the last possible moment. K and K have the next game, taking

a flipper each. Their score indicates a certain understanding of machines.

INSIDE the second Disco. LONG SHOT. As black as the first was blue. People dance entirely self absorbed inside a gold cage.

MEDIUM SHOT of K and K.

K: Of course it can get to the point where no contact is possible because everyone is so into themselves.

K: This is OK for a time but there are other periods where an exchange of energies between people and poles is necessary and stimulating.

K: We try with music like "Showroom Dummies" to put some kind of FILM CONSCIOUSNESS...

K: ...Film Consciousness over to people. Where you can look at your self through your own camera... K... Or listen to yourself with your own inbuilt tape recorder

K: Disco should be therapeutic when it no longer matters who you are.



K and K: In front of the loudspeakers everybody is equal.

INSIDE the Mercedes. Night. LONG SHOTS of the deserted city streets as the Mercedes speeds through the dark. Soundtrack: "United" from Throbbing Gristle.

K and K sit in front.

K: We would rather be able to stay in the city and speak to businessmen or whomever than become artists in a rich ghetto.

K: We meet people, say hello. We know what they think. What they would like.

K: Why should we stay in villas when we can have the freedom to walk the city? This is where we get our ideas.

K: Since Germany has gone through the war I think it could only happen here. America is so much orientated towards the star system.

K: What so-and-so eats for breakfast.

K: Germany had a very effective star system in the '30s and '40s which was not only perfected by the media but by politics too. People know where it can go.

K: It's more interesting now to try and see ourselves as workers or scientists.

C: [from the back] Is it true Hitler wouldn't allow himself to be photographed wearing glasses?

K and K: Just your average paranoia.

EXTERIOR. The Mercedes glides through the dark and deserted streets of Düsseldorf.

CAPTION. We are the link between the '20s and the '80s. All change in society passes through a sympathetic collaboration with tape recorders, polaroids, synthesisers, (INSERT) and telephones. Our reality is an electronic reality.

INSERT: video. ▲

09 COMPUTER WORLD

PREDICTING A FUTURE IN WHICH WE LIVE AND LOVE VIA LAPTOP, KRAFTWERK BOOT UP THE SOURCE CODE OF TECHNO. BY SHARON O'CONNELL

RELEASED: MAY 10, 1981

KRAFTWERK'S imperial phase is widely acknowledged as 1974–'77, years that laid the groundwork for *The Man-Machine*, in the band's own view their greatest achievement and the gateway to '80s synth-pop. But sandwiched in between that album and the troublesome *Electric Café* sits 1981's *Computer World*, which not only delivered them their biggest hit but also set in motion the development of a whole new electronic music genre that twinned Düsseldorf with Detroit.

Their albums were demonstrably themed from *Autobahn*, but it was *Computer World* that saw the band making a new level of commitment to the conceptual, in a set where form and content are inextricably entwined. Prescience is often mentioned in connection with Kraftwerk – as if their futurism were due to uncanny powers. Worth more serious consideration is the fact that these were “sound scientists” with an interest in technological advancement and cultural progress. As such they could offer reasonably well-founded guesses as to which way those winds would blow.

Still, the title must have had a powerful resonance. In Britain, the album's release chimed with that of the ZX81, the first affordable mass-market computer, designed by Sinclair Research for home use rather than for businesspeople and/or electronics hobbyists. These days, of course, the device on the cover of *Computer World* – in fact not a computer, but what looks like a 1970's Hazeltine 1500 VDU terminal – with its screen featuring band members' stylised heads etched in

sulphuric yellow, is a museum piece. In 1981, it must have seemed like the signifier of a brand-new way of life.

As conscientious “workers”, Kraftwerk did their album prep by visiting the Düsseldorf division of IBM to learn about digital technology, and there saw the ways in which it was superior to analogue, in terms of making music. They took it on board, but despite the promise of its (brilliantly mundane) title, their eighth album was made using only analogue gear. As Karl Bartos told *Music Technology* in 1993: “The cutting edge is not a piece of equipment, the cutting edge is in here [a head tap]. It's in the imagination. William Gibson wrote *Neuromancer* on an old typewriter.” Referring to the period after *Computer World*, he also expressed his disdain for samplers. “Ralf made a big mistake when he bought a Synclavier – sorry, Ralf. A sampler is nothing; it's like a radio, a receiver and transmitter. It makes no sound of its own.”

In 1981, then, when a Fairlight CMI would have been the object of desire for a lot of synth-pop acts, Kraftwerk were still committed to the constantly regenerating “electronic garden” that was their Kling Klang studio, with its customised analogue set-up. Their belief, too, that music is essentially a product of the imagination, with instruments designed to serve its expression and musicians mere

operators, is underlined by the lack of full personnel credits in the original album sleeve notes. Those details were added in the 2009 remastered reissue. “We don't see ourselves as specific instrumentalists,” explained Ralf Hütter to *Electronics & Music Maker* in 1981. “I am not just a keyboard player, nor is Wolfgang [Flür] simply a drummer; this is too limiting for each player who has developed skills in making harmonies and melodies as well as rhythms.”

From 1974, Kraftwerk's album themes run in the order of travel, radio communication/nuclear dread, European modernism and physical mechanics, a working method Hütter explained to *The Face* in 1982: “We're not very varied; we zoom in on one subject because it's not really songwriting. It's more symphonic, the way we write, part of our German musical culture, the orchestral tradition. That's why we use our voices as sound, not really as singing.” True enough, but the conceptual approach also

suitied their role as commentators on and sonic imitators of elements of everyday, urban, progressive (West) German life. Given advancements in computer science around the time, it was maybe inevitable that Kraftwerk would turn their attention to computer programming and communication, ▶

THEMES INCLUDE
RADIO COMMS,
NUCLEAR DREAD,
DATA STORAGE ON
CITIZENS UNDER
STATE CONTROL



mindful of related issues like the storing of data on a population under state control and within a heavily bureaucratic system. But alongside those paranoid possibilities, the band also recognised technology's huge creative potential.

How could they not, given the way their music was made? "We are more interested in cooperating with computers as an extension of the creative side of the human being," Hütter told Beacon Radio in the year *Computer World* was released. "Which I think is more the way society should be going: being more productive in expressing your ideas and fantasies and wishes, or visions. Anything that could help in making society a better place to live in, you know? And we feel we're only just starting to go in this direction, with the help of musical machines, computers or whatever it takes to put ideas across to other people. Communication between people in the technological society is what we are about."

It's a claim borne out by seven tracks (running to 34 minutes) that are overall as warmly humanistic and playful as they are clean, minimal and serene. If they also comment on our socio-economic structures and increasing dependence on technology, then they do so in a measured, even polite way. Take the opening title track, which addresses the dubious symbiotic relationship between financial institutions and government agencies in a heavily reverbed couplet: "*Interpol and Deutsche Bank, FBI and Scotland Yard,*" followed by the robo-voiced chant, "*Business, numbers, money, people.*" They read more like a PowerPoint summary than song lyrics. But the potency of "*Computer World*" lies in the contrast between that deadpan litany and its backdrop – an urgent, flickering pulse, a sweet, lilting central melody and devastatingly simple synthesiser chord change. It's audaciously weightless, a tune that's barely there.

Even more minimal is "*Computer World 2*", which moves at a crisp canter and features treated vocals – counting mainly in German, but also in English, Italian and Spanish – that gradually speed up until they become an incomprehensible, slightly sinister babble. It segues from "*Numbers*", which anchors similarly multilingual, distorted vocals – produced by Florian Schneider using a hand-held translation device made by Texas Instruments – and discrete stabs of static-like synth to an almost thuggish, EDM-styled beat pattern, suggesting flickering fields of data in automated trading centres.

ON the other side of "*Computer World 2*" sits the gently percolating, irresistibly forlorn "*Computer Love*". It makes

Kraftwerk's foresight difficult to deny, calling out as it does the faux intimacy of onscreen engagement and the peculiar isolation that comes with increased connectivity.

"*Another lonely night, stare at the TV screen/I don't know what to do, I need a rendez-vous,*" sings Hütter (who co-wrote the lyrics with sleeve designer Emil Schult), his voice heavy with ennui. And then, fast-forwarding from the days of Teletext

to Tinder, "*I call this number for a data date/I don't know what to do, I need a rendez-vous.*" It's a seven-minute declaration of alienation made to an indifferent universe; one that also toggles the twin ideas of romance/sex found via computer and infatuation with the computer itself.

Philosophically moody stuff for a

pop single, maybe, but in February of 1982, "*Computer Love*" hit the UK No 1 spot as the B-side to "*The Model*" and stayed in the Top 20 for seven weeks. It was originally released in July the year before with the latter song on its flip and made the Top 40, but was reissued by EMI (without Kraftwerk's blessing, it seems) when they noticed "*The Model*"'s popularity with DJs. That second lease of life delivered the band their biggest commercial success. Over 20 years later, it also served Coldplay pretty well: an interpolation of the song's central riff, played on guitar rather than synth, shaped their UK Top 10 single "*Talk*", from *X&Y*.

In terms of inspiration, *Computer World* has provided rich pickings down the years. Most famously, perhaps, for fellow futurist Afrika Bambaataa, whose "*Planet Rock*" features a lift from "*Numbers*" (alongside one from "Trans-Europe Express"), as does DJ Shadow's "*What Does Your Soul Look Like #4*". Both Ricardo Villalobos's "*Lugom-IX*" and Traxman's "*Computer Ghetto*" plainly echo the album's title track, while Beck's "*Get Real Paid*" and LCD Soundsystem's "*Disco Infiltrator*" lean briefly on "*Home Computer*". That's not an exhaustive list, but it

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"So what if the closing track '*It's More Fun To Compute*' is positively innocuous compared to some of their earlier material. You can dance to it and the new commerciality is itself a fresh direction within which they maintain their credibility."

"This is Kraftwerk's first pop album. Didn't you always guess that beneath those showroom dummy exteriors was a bunch of whacky Germans looking for a party. Well it looks like they found one."

IAN PYE, MELODY MAKER, MAY 9, 1981

"What sets Kraftwerk apart from every other tyro synthesiser outfit is the way they construct and combine several tunes and rhythms so as to leave space for any number of additional components which unconsciously pop into the listener's head."

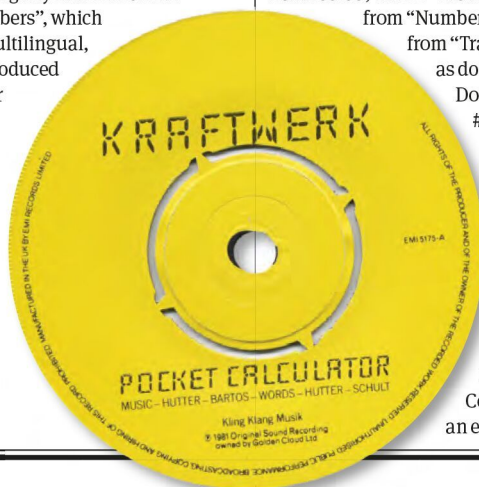
ANDY GILL, NME, MAY 16, 1981

does point to the wider recognition of what Simon Reynolds has called the "ancestral centrality" of Kraftwerk in synth-pop and in

particular to the resonance of this album, whose brightness, calm and (in general) positivity about the future in retrospect make it sound touchingly naive, the more our current relationship with technology sours. And a title like "*It's More Fun To Compute*" – reputedly a twist on the slogan "*It's more fun to compete*", often seen on pinball machines at the time – can't help but sound darkly ironic almost 40 years on, especially since the music suggests the *Blade Runner* techno score Derrick May never wrote. That track is the mood mate to "*Home Computer*", where Schneider's declaration, "*I programme my home computer, beam myself into the future,*" is set against a backdrop that recalls Bernard Herrmann and the ambience of *Alphaville*, while throwing forward to Jeff Mills.

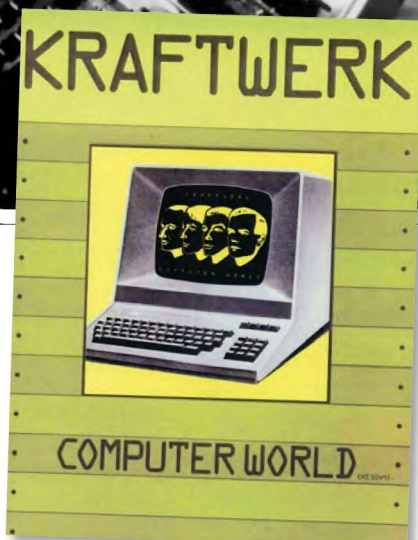
In contrast is "*Pocket Calculator*", the endearingly playful electronic symphony of blurs, sproings, bleeps and farts with a commentary that sounds delighted by its own agency: "*I am adding and subtracting, I'm controlling and composing... By pressing down a special key, it plays a little melody.*" Props there

IN TERMS OF
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DOWN THE YEARS





Music for dummies



to Casio's FX-501P programmable calculator, listed as an instrument in the sleeve notes. Kraftwerk even commissioned the company to make as a promo item a calculator that was also a synth, with ersatz sheet music for their tunes included. This playfulness extended to the *Computer World* tour, where in the shows' encores all four would stand at the front of the stage holding, for example, a Stylophone or Mattel keyboard and – in what may well have been a first in “interactive” gig history – invite audience members to make sounds. It's presumably why a *Guardian* review of London's Lyceum show in June of 1981 described it as “less like a visit to Metropolis than a store filled with marvellous clockwork toys”.

That world tour, which included drummer Flür although he didn't play on the album, saw Kraftwerk taking their entire Kling Klang studio, reconstituted in modular form, with them. It racked up a gruelling 90 dates, including a show in Detroit at a club called Nitro. Talking to the *Detroit Free Press* in June of 1998, Hütter recalled that the crowd reaction was “very strong, very dynamic”, adding, “We always predicted this electronic music would be the next step.” In 1981, as Cybotron, Detroit's Juan Atkins and Richard Davis released “Alleys Of Your Mind”, now recognised as the proto-techno track. Of course, they and other techno pioneers hadn't just discovered Kraftwerk, they'd been listening to their music since the late '70s on

local DJ Electrifying Mojo's radio show, *Midnight Funk Association*. But *Computer World* had perhaps exerted a crucial extra pull on artists from a city that, like Düsseldorf, was heavily industrialised and who recognised in its sound if not funk, then certainly a fascination with rhythm. Atkins has spoken of being mesmerised by Kraftwerk's precision the first time he heard them and that quality is central to techno. Five years on, though, the band would struggle, abandoning their reliance on concepts, scrapping and remaking their ninth album and losing a member (Bartos). The lean, clean and elegantly elegiac *Computer World* was the last record in a seemingly effortless and extraordinarily impressive run. ☘

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...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...COMPUTER LOVE. COMPUTER LOVE. COMPUTER LOVE.....

1. Computer World*****
2. Pocket Calculator*****
3. Numbers*****
4. Computer World 2*****
5. Computer Love*****
6. Home Computer*****

7. It's More Fun To Compute*****
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter,
 Florian Schneider
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang studio,
 Düsseldorf
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (vocals,

keyboards, synths, sequencer,
 electronics), Florian Schneider
 (synths, electronics), Karl Bartos
 (electronic percussion)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
 UK 15; US 72



Looking good: Kraftwerk in front of the world time clock at the Keio Plaza Hotel, Tokyo, September 1981

"WE HAVE NOBODY TO LISTEN TO"

A European odyssey with **KRAFTWERK**. Having recently rebuilt their studio, the band now embraces the dilemmas, freedoms and controls of the computer age. **RALF HÜTTER** talks German humour, Coca-Cola and "vertically organised" music. "We see ourselves as studio technicians," he tells **CHRIS BOHN**. "We have to impose every question, and find the correct answer."

NEW MUSICIAN INTERVIEW | JUNE 13, 1981



PART 1

"ART is not a 'profession'. There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, moments beyond the control of his will, the

grace of Heaven may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency to his craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies a source of creative imagination." (From the first proclamation of the Weimar Bauhaus, 1919)

SPAIN might currently be in turmoil, what with its armed forces' flexing of musclebound strength posing a threat to its still unsettled democracy, but there are no ripples of unrest to disturb the afternoon siesta of a dozing Barcelona. Only the foolhardy tourists who flood the city every summer brave the unrelenting heat and dust of the streets.

Many of them are from Britain and Germany, and it's easy to see what attracts them: the city's proximity to the sea, its odd, indigenous

architecture and, of course, a good exchange rate. For the Germans its location also fulfils a romantic northern longing for the warmth and promise of the south and the Mediterranean.

Kraftwerk, too, feel the urge. Their main motivating force Ralf Hütter wandered through Spain a decade ago – so he reveals later to a Spanish record company executive from the back

of a taxi careering through the night – but he was put off by the hippies clogging islands and resorts like Ibiza. Besides, he doesn't enjoy the tourist role, preferring instead a more constructive purpose for travelling, like work.

Consequently Kraftwerk's European tour satisfies both their wanderlust and their need for communication/feedback. Despite their modernity, a fear of flying means they are driving themselves across the Continent – so far down from Düsseldorf through Bavaria and the Alps to Italy, across to the South of

France and down again, through the Pyrenees, to Barcelona. From city to city, concert to concert, disco to disco.

Yet there's none of the whining rock "road goes on forever" aura about their tour. It's more a dignified, inquisitive jaunt across countries, its

"WE TRY TO DO IT ALL THE WAY IMPOSING THE PROCESS AS A DISCIPLINE" RALF HÜTTER

moods, pleasures and languors so beautifully evoked already by their seven-year-old hit "Autobahn". That great, compellingly endless tune was Kraftwerk's stunning entrance into a gleaming chromium world. They had made earlier records that fiddled about with more extreme noises which they later smoothed out into sweet melodies, like the "Pineapple Symphony".

"Autobahn" was, however, the first real stirring of their innovative pop sensibility – a witty synthetic delight concocted from mock traffic noises and a wide, open-spaced tune, motored by then-intriguing new electronic percussion and a mechanical rhythm. It suggested a harmony between the aggressive, awe-inspiring Autobahn network crisscrossing Germany and the lush landscapes it traverses. And ever since, Kraftwerk have reconciled the spirit of Mother Nature with modern technology, recognising that real progress must embrace them both.

Acknowledging the futility of simply retreating to the country, they have instead achieved an immense understanding of computers and machines, which they have placed at their service. Theirs isn't a dumb worship of inanimate objects but a sensible relationship with them; they don't make an idiotic cult of speed and modernity, as did the Italian Futurists. They have too much respect for the accomplishments of the past for

that, be they those of the Bauhaus or the architects behind Vienna or Versailles.

Take a *Trans-Europe Express* trip with Kraftwerk and see how they recall the grandeur and decay of old Europe through fabulous futuristic noises. Go to work with *The Man-Machine* and discover a proper working relationship between man and his urban environment, perhaps recognising for the first time the splendid brittle beauties of new cities and industrial scenery. Tune in to *Radio-Activity* and learn just how romantic Kraftwerk can get, how well they drain conceivably maudlin melodies of sentimentality, thus adjusting the spirit of the old to the new.

Go see Kraftwerk in concert and marvel at the reconstructed working environment of their studio – all of which accompanies them on this tour – and at the videos projected onto screens behind each member that so wonderfully illustrate what they're doing. And, finally, puzzle over and absorb Kraftwerk's extraordinary harnessing of so much technology to create a complete word-sound-vision entertainment that is as simple as it is spectacular, as provocative as it is plain, as comical as it is earnest and – most importantly – as spiritual as it is temporal. Predictably, in their rush to ride a fashion too many of the new electronic poppas have been too busy to burrow beneath Kraftwerk's surface

sheen. And in their search for a comfortable niche they've even got that much wrong. Robotic gestures are just the final topping for Kraftwerk, not a *raison d'être*, and similarly their descriptive postcard views are the culmination of penetrating analysis and thought. Kraftwerk's finished work is simple, stylish and on the button – that of the Futurists is faddish, foppish and simple-minded.

FROM city-to-concert-to-disco. The grandeur of old Barcelona is as near to a perfect – ie contradictory – setting as you can get for Kraftwerk. They're staying in an imposingly haughty Regency hotel that at first appears at odds with their austere monochromatic image. Offstage, Florian Schneider (the other half of Kraftwerk's production team) fits, dressed as he is in a neutral-coloured windcheater with a little knapsack on his back for his wanderings. For reasons of privacy they have requested that Anton Corbijn and me should stay in a different hotel – fair enough – but they are unfailingly polite and friendly when we meet.

Kraftwerk like to observe the formalities, sensibly concealing their real personalities from public scrutiny. However, the impassive gaze of their showroom dummy stageselves – pitched somewhere between Buster Keaton and William Burroughs – becomes animated in conversation. Rumour has it that Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos

"We are situationists": Kraftwerk performing at London's Lyceum, May 17, 1981



– the glamorous rhythm half of Kraftwerk – can't speak English, if they can speak at all, and this, too, turns out to be a fallacy. A brief meeting with the group before they rush off to a soundcheck is resumed in the dressing room after the concert. The reaction had been good, thus they're more relaxed and communicative.

Bearing in mind the flourishing of electronic pop in Britain, Karl is eager to know how well they might be received on their visit. No competition, I assure him. Magazine have split up. Simple Minds are inactive. Heaven 17 hidden away up North, Numan retired, and the rest are but poor, directionless imitations of Kraftwerk.

But most forward of the Kraftwerk entourage is long-time offstage collaborator Emil Schult, whose long curly blond hair pulled back into a pony tail, tanned bronze features and tight black satin pants make him an unlikely component. After passing a few good-natured comments about my dress sense, he launches into a tirade against cities. "Cities are dirty, filthy places," he observes. "Five days in Barcelona are like five years off my life. Are there any back-to-the-country movements in England?"

No, they were discredited by hippie failures. At the moment there is nothing to match the strength of the European ecological movements that are willing to battle against police and paramilitary riot officers to prevent nuclear power stations appearing on their doorsteps. Or the strong eco-party lobbies – like Germany's Green Party – that win votes and respect from the mainstream.

He smiles knowingly and then continues: "It's a much better life in the country. It's good that there is a

new consciousness in songs like that one from Talking Heads about breathing good air. In some ways that is what Kraftwerk are about, too."

This is the man who co-writes Kraftwerk songs and works on their graphics. He spends eight months a year on an island in the Bahamas, where he is building a one-roomed house, and he's critical that the natives have been corrupted by Western ways. "Once they were strong and healthy; now they eat too much sweets and sugar, so they have become fat and soft. But you can't tell them it's bad," he despairs.

Schult fits into the Kraftwerk operation along with the computer technicians and mathematicians. Theirs is a multi-faceted, all-embracing corporation that preaches through its practices. Its ideals come close to that of Das Bauhaus, the '20s school of thought with whom they share a great affinity. "I see us as the musical Bauhaus," concurs Ralf Hütter. "In their time they could work in theatre, architecture, photography and short films, but they did not really have the technology to apply their ideas to music; we now have it. We see ourselves as studio technicians or musical workers – not as musical artists."

But it's not all work. Wolfgang and Ralf are habitual disco-goers, so after the concert, while Florian and Karl go looking for something to eat, the dancing duo visit Barcelona's Studio 54. They

look great, twitching like animated versions of the figures they bring onstage during "Showroom Dummies" among the bizarre mix of half-naked go-go dancers, Travoltas and tourists looking for a good time. They're totally engrossed in their own movements, seemingly oblivious to all around them. Yet, as with all the environments they choose, they become very much part of it. So much so that I'm surprised Ralf Hütter is up in time – I'm surprised I'm up in time – for the scheduled interview only a few hours after we leave the disco for bed.

He betrays no signs of tiredness from the previous night or exhaustion from the tour. In close-up his youthful looks are belied by the streaks of grey in his hair. He is composed, yet good humoured, his soft voice willing to answer any questions, his English vocabulary seldom failing him. What's more his confidence in what he's doing means there is none of the self-conscious stuttering that many English groups lapse into when they discuss their work.

PART II

"WHOSE details and history are in the government computers? The security force alone has records of more than two million citizens. A person affected has no means of discovering, any more than they can check the combinations possible with this information and that from other computers... To produce a complete 'inventory' of the population there is at present being developed in the Federal Republic an information system and registration law which recalls the frightening visions of Orwell's 1984. There is a plan for what are known as personal numbers."

(Sebastian Cobler: *Law, Order And Politics In West Germany*)

BOHN: When I saw the titles of your new records were to be *Computer World* and "Pocket Calculator", my first impressions were that Kraftwerk had slipped into self-parody.

RALF HÜTTER: Why did you think self-parody?

"IT SEEMED LIKE
THE NEXT STEP,
FROM ROBOTS TO
PROGRAMMING
OF THOUGHTS"
RALF HÜTTER

The pursuit of New Age themes from showroom dummies through robots to computers...

Well, I think that for us it was the only thing we could do at that moment because we had spent three years breaking up our studio and rebuilding it with computers. Just by looking around us – around our studio and outside – it made us see that we were surrounded by computers, that our whole society is computerised. And as we were working on the connection between numbers and notes, computers seemed

the closest subject for us to do. It was not intended in a parodic way. To us it seemed like the next step, from robots/physical automation to programming of thoughts within Kraftwerk and within society. Within Kraftwerk because everybody is programmed sociologically. And by working over the years with reproductions on machines, tapes, photos and videos we found out so much about our own programming of a long time ago, a time when we were not aware of ourselves being





Bartos (left), Flür and Schneider handcraft the sound at the Capitol Theatre in Sydney, September 16–18, 1981

programmed – in education, by parents, or those other things.

The combination of studying computers and building them in the studio was almost a cleansing process of previous programming?

Yes, processing is the word to describe the thing. Everything in our studio is now interconnected through the computers, so we had to rethink the whole system and program ourselves into that. Now everything is automatic, but we can always interfere as we have access to the programming. It means that we can now play anything and that completely changes our relationship with physical music. You can no longer say, “That’s good music, but we need three more trumpets”, because if we want sounds we obviously just make the sounds ourselves. It’s going to create new tensions and possibilities for us.

Does that frighten or excite you?

We are, *uh*, nervous, but we are also fatalistic...

Why fatalistic?

Because we are German and there is a fatalistic German quality of going all the way. There is never a question of maybe using a little computer here and plugging it into the synthesiser there and keeping the rest of the group as it was before. We close the door for three years and don’t open it. We try to do it all the way, imposing the process as a discipline on ourselves, really taking it all the way and then going out of the room to see where that takes us. I think that is very Germanic.

Broadening the subject slightly, the title track “Computer World” hints at international conspiracy in its lines “Interpol and Deutsche Bank, FBI and Scotland Yard”.

Well, now that it has been penetrated by micro-electronics our whole society is computerised, and each one of us is stored into some point of information by some company or organisation, all stored by numbers. When you get into Germany at a border, they place your passport into a machine connected to the *Bundeskriminalamt* in Wiesbaden so they can check whether you can enter or leave, for various reasons other than whether your passport is correct. It goes much further than that, there’s a whole philosophy of, *er* – it’s our 1984.

**“OUR MAIN THING
WAS SOUND,
AND THE WORDS
JUST SLIPPED
INTO OUR MUSIC”**
RALF HÜTTER

But the willingness of the people to accept something like the Wiesbaden police computer complex seems to indicate that a majority of the German people wants order or at least a regulated lifestyle.

If you are insecure about basic instincts of yourself then you have to look and maybe listen to outside impulses to tell you what to do. Which is not exactly what we are about, but certainly what a lot of Germany is about – and by living there,

working there, we can’t dissociate ourselves from it completely. We have certainly discovered that those things are part of our programming. And working with computers all the time you become very much aware of how the control thing works and could be done – especially in Germany, where computerisation of control organisations is very

big. There are stores and societies which control your financial situation, so the whole computerisation gets more like a 1984 vision. Our idea is to take computers out of context of those control functions and use them creatively in an area where people do not expect to find them. Like using pocket calculators to make music, for instance. Nobody knew you could do that. We always try to do things to break the normal order – and knowing it so well from Germany, we know how to break it... possibly [*a slight smile*]. It’s about time technology was used in resistance; it shouldn’t be shunned, reviled or glorified. Yes, we created a softer attitude, going much more into the human behaviour of those type of things. What we always try to do is to plug ourselves in and steal a little away from those companies, using guerrilla tactics to steal from the rich conglomerates... Like we got this mathematician into doing something he wouldn’t normally do – help make music. And we communicate data to him by computer, avoiding then the post office telephone monopoly on communications.

It’s ironic that Kraftwerk have a reputation for being so distinctly German – in dress, observation of formalities, eating cakes in cafés – when you obviously don’t like some aspects of modern Germany.

Ja, that’s the war, we have to go through this whole process because in England, or in America, you have a living culture, but in Germany we don’t have that. In the war Germany was finished, everything wiped out physically and also mentally. We were nowhere. The only people we could relate to, we had to go back 50 years into the ’20s. On the other hand, we were brought up in the British sector and that’s nothing we could relate to. There’s no living musical thing other than the 50-years-old musical thing or semi-academic

electronic music, meaning psychologically we had to get ourselves going. And that has only been possible with our generation. You can see the generation before ours that is 10 years older and they could not do it. The only thing they could do was get fat and drink. There was so much accumulated guilt that it physically took another generation to be productive, to be willing to say, "OK, I'm doing a song called 'Trans Europa Express'" or something. That's why we don't have any contact with people older than us. It's just impossible – it's a real break. But now with our generation it has begun again, with the films of Fassbinder, Herzog and Wenders or the writing of Peter Handke, for instance. Our music was used in the last section of *Alexanderplatz* (the famous '20s novel of Alfred Döblin, recently subjected to a controversial TV serialisation by Fassbinder).

There was about 20 minutes of visions and horror sequences with our music.

(A suitable link between generations). How about relations with your parents?

It's difficult, but they are several years older, even pre-Nazi... We certainly represent the generation with no fathers. We have nobody to listen to, no old wise men or anything. We have to impose every question on ourselves and try to find the correct answer. That we were completely alone was hard to accept at first, but after a few years we find that it is also encouraging because it gives you possibilities of doing new things.

In England we're partly encumbered by useless, decaying traditions that are nevertheless difficult to cast off...

I think so, but that will crumble away...

Getting back to your generation, weren't the RAF/Baader-Meinhof Gang cited as reasons for the increased surveillance that resulted in the Wiesbaden centre?

Maybe, but the people who created Wiesbaden are just putting their minds on the table. I mean, they have that in their heads for a long time, so if it were the Baader-Meinhof Gang or the weather that gave them the excuse they would have done it, because that is the only thing they would think about doing. The people involved were brought up in Nazi kindergartens, they always see things in terms of punishment, guilt, restrictions, everybody in a role. And they can never find out what they are like. They can't go that far back into the programming process to change their modules of behaviour. The guy responsible for Wiesbaden is retired now, but he probably imposes the same system of order in his house – it's so much part of his system.

Your generation had two choices – identify with the foreign cultures of occupying powers or go back to the '20s?

We are very anti-American in a way because we were feeling so much how they came to Germany with Coca-Cola and chewing gum. As children we at first thought it was great, you know, big uncle coming down the street with Coca-Cola. I can still remember when I was very young how they came through the streets on tanks giving it out. We took it at the time, but over the years you more and more doubt what's happening and where you stand. It has nothing to do with nationalistic feelings, it's more a cultural thing – it has to do with more spiritual feelings, Continental feelings...

Were you worried that your identification with Germany would be misinterpreted abroad?

No. For us it was more an identity thing. It was the process of finding out who we were. The whole thing of Kraftwerk going through those different LPs... Like *Autobahn* – everybody in

Germany said singing German lyrics was crazy. Can you imagine that 75 per cent of our radio programmes were in English. Naturally we don't want it all to be in German, but such a high percentage? It is becoming better now – I'm really complaining about a few years ago.

Having talked to younger German groups, like DAF and Der Plan, I'm always impressed by their sense of purpose and their unself-conscious willingness to talk about their music – an area which English groups often hedge around.

Well, it's so hard in Germany to be productive that you have to discipline yourself very much and put yourself through a lot of effort to get anywhere. When we first started it was impossible to find anywhere to play. We built our own equipment, telephoned and arranged everything ourselves... It was just little guerrilla tactics in order to get anywhere. And once you have decided to do it, then you have adopted it as a lifestyle. But finally it has broken here and there is much activity in German now. It is no longer the case of people completely denying their identity and having to sing in English.

BRIAN RASCH/GETTY



Console culture:
Ralf Hütter,
Hammersmith
Odeon, London,
July 2-3, 1981



Never phoning it in:
Kraftwerk in the Kolo
Plaza Hotel, Tokyo,
September 1981

The intellectual process that has obviously gone into the construction of your LPs manifests itself in a simple pop form. Do you think it's getting so simple that people are missing the point?

No. We consider our music minimalist to a point and that again maybe has something to do with our so-called classical upbringing, where one of the highest goals is to play very complicated pieces. We would rather go for the meaning. If we wanted to play complicated things with our equipment it would be just a matter of pressing one or two more buttons. Besides, I never like practising, because that is again part of the system of order – you put the notes in order. The system imposes itself in every aspect of human life, not just passports, but music too. Music must be in order too. This created some very strange feelings in myself at the time. Our music is very primitive – the German word is *geradeaus* [straight ahead] and that is the best word for it. Simple means a little stupid, minimalist means reduced, but *geradeaus* means: you know where you are going and you try to get there as fast as possible. We once called our music *Industrielle Volksmusik*. I think that's what we stand for. We're very much involved with environment. Düsseldorf is called "The Office

of the Ruhr" [the heavy industrial belt of Germany] – it is all glass and steel and concrete and blocks...

In England many so-called futurist groups took *The Man-Machine* idea the wrong way, take a simplistic view of extolling machinery when they should have just used it.

The Man-Machine is more like establishing a balance between man and the machine, more a friendship, otherwise we would have called the album "Machine". Also, in the '70s everybody was calling their albums something like "Man", everybody simplistically talked so much about human qualities – "*I love you baby, forever*", for example. But we wanted to talk about the relationship between man and machines and the Russian context of *Rabotnik*, meaning worker. We always thought of ourselves as workers in sound, as studio or musical workers – not musicians or musical artists, but as musical workers, going into the studio to work. And the whole thing was to develop that. We had so many problems in the '70s because nobody was attuned to it.

Coming back from last night's concert, your collaborator Emil Schult spoke of back-to-the-

land movements and a healthier, more natural lifestyle. He said that Kraftwerk in a way represented this.

That has to do with the second electronic revolution. We went through the mechanical side three years ago and now it's the electronic data and processing – we are getting more into software and organisms, how organisms come about. There's a tendency to read bio-rhythms within the group of people who live in our home. For us there's no longer a difference between all those things – they've all been part of the programming process. One time we called our Kling Klang studio the "Electronic Garden" – we have bridged the gap between music and technology.

Kraftwerk's relationship to computers is more ambivalent, then?

Ambivalence is right – we're not glorifying anything. It's more like by living in West Germany you can see how society can be manoeuvred with these electronic computers. What we are trying to do is firstly make that transparent and then maybe try to expose how you can do other things, because computers are like blank tapes: you can cover them with bits or change their direction, even though they too can change – they did change – our



soft/hard, melodic/cacophonous. It's become more unified, easier on the ear.

Yes, but we have gone more radical synthetic. Everything we do now is completely produced by computerising the whole thing. Even the rhythms are horizontally and vertically organised.

The Kraftwerk personnel seem strongly integrated into the Kraftwerk persona. Is there a difference between your stage and private persona?

Our personal life is our stage life; sometimes we get confused and sometimes I get mixed up. It's just a level of awareness, a feeling for the moment. There is really nothing else we do apart from Kraftwerk and related things. We have no other choice than going totally into that thing.

It's strange that you haunt the discos, enjoying the physical activity of dancing, perhaps?

Yes [*with a sly grin*], but we are dancing very mechanical. To us it's all part of... we are situationists. It's hard to express, maybe we should write some more songs about it. Like "Showroom Dummies", which says, "It's two o'clock, we start to dance, we are showroom dummies" coming to life. We are also living in the streets, in the cities, everywhere. We can't separate this life from that. It's all one life and at the end we are dead.

Do you see Kraftwerk as a comedy of manners?

That's behaviour? Certainly there's some degree of black humour in us – we are mostly wearing black! There's a certain tradition of humour where we live, that has become part of us.

There seems to be a glee about you during the performance of "Pocket Calculator" when you all leave your keyboards to perform a dance routine at the front of the stage.

**"OUR PERSONAL
LIFE IS OUR
STAGE LIFE;
SOMETIMES WE
GET CONFUSED"**
RALF HÜTTER

Yes, because mostly we are physically bound to elaborate equipment. Florian bought a [*musical*] pocket calculator last Christmas in the department store, brought it to the studio where we started playing around with it. It was a new thing for us. It was a minimalistic liberation for us. I think that mini electronics are very interesting.

Being so interested in video and automated beings, why have you taken to the road

yourself instead of sending out visual/mechanical aids as stand-ins?

We did that before, a couple of years ago. In New York we played a press show with dummies. And one time in Paris to launch *The Man-Machine*. What we wanted to do this time was put ourselves through the whole new situation of going out with our entire studio, because we had been locked in for three years to make this new album and concept. For the first time we would be able to go out, make some little excursions, walk around and come back the

other way. It's a really open thing because we don't know how it'll turn out. It will reflect in our music because we always draw our ideas from the work we do, putting our music and machinery through this whole process.

Do you take a fatalistic interest in things at the point of crisis, when things are in the balance?

[*After a long pause*] Maybe, because that's the point where changes come about and maybe, subconsciously at least, we are very easily bored by a stable situation. Electronic music is a very liquid situation, not like rock'n'roll, which is a very stable format. We're not in a box like that, we're not afraid, we're attracted by certain things in motion... ▲

attitudes towards music... It's really hard to express this in words because *Computer World* is still so close that I haven't reflected upon everything in it.

Don't you get the urge to make more of this in your lyrics, which are mainly plainly descriptive?

We always try to plant lyrics like clues, use them as codes, because otherwise lyrics tend to catch you intellectually and only that. That would disturb our *Ganzheit* [*wholeness*] principle. Also, it's part of our Germanic thing, the little symphonic thing, where words are there but voices aren't mixed very high. Our main thing was sound, and the words just slipped into our music.

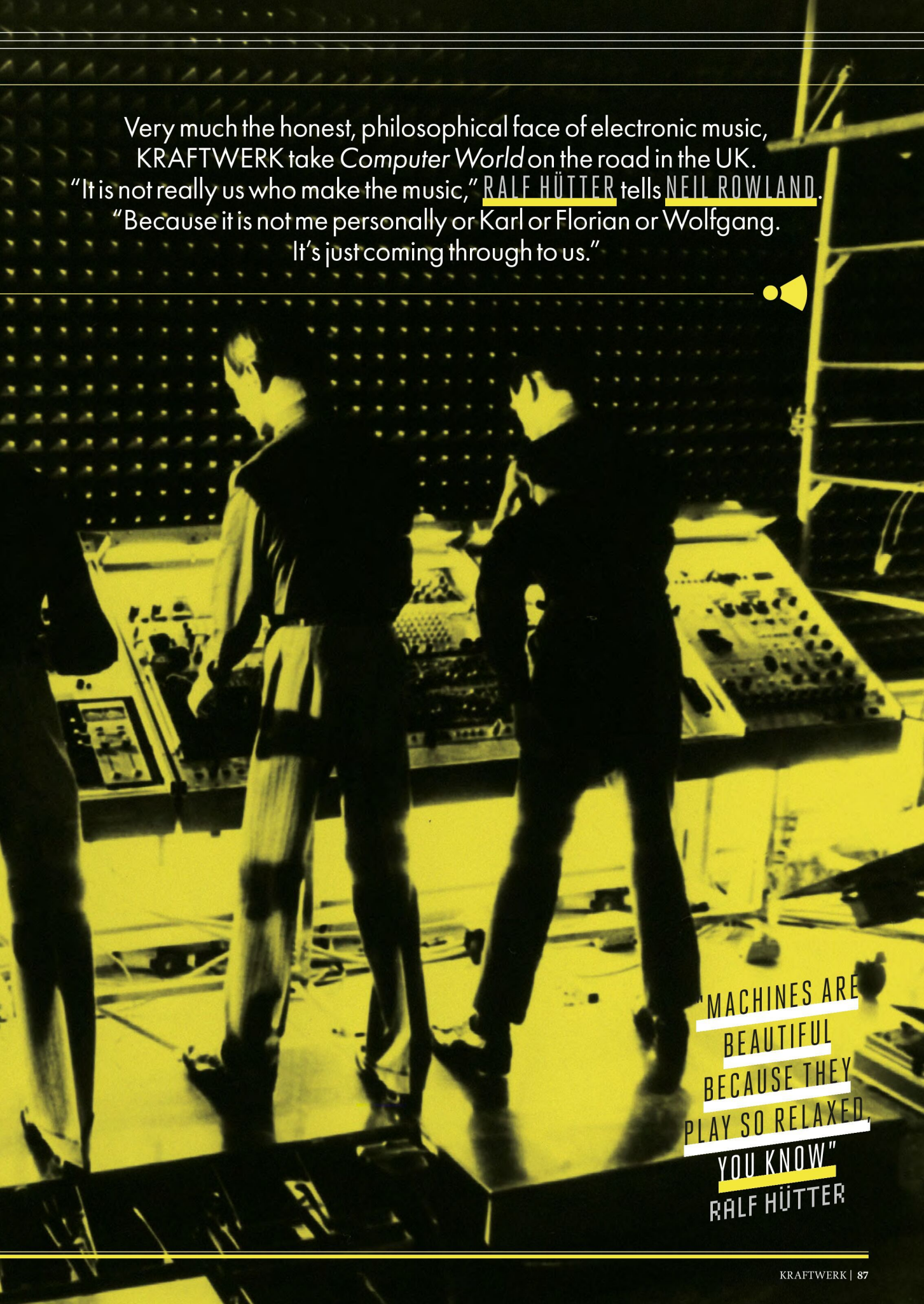
The music was more extreme once, a system of contrasts and opposites: loud/quiet,



Kraftwerk in Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, June 1981: (l-r) Ralf Hütter, Karl Bartos, Wolfgang Flür and Florian Schneider

"A RESULT OF RESEARCH"

STARA/KRAFTWERK/GETTY IMAGES



Very much the honest, philosophical face of electronic music,
KRAFTWERK take *Computer World* on the road in the UK.
"It is not really us who make the music," RALF HÜTTER tells NEIL ROWLAND.
"Because it is not me personally or Karl or Florian or Wolfgang.
It's just coming through to us."

"MACHINES ARE
BEAUTIFUL
BECAUSE THEY
PLAY SO RELAXED,
YOU KNOW"
RALF HÜTTER



MELODY MAKER JULY 4, 1981



SPEEDING towards Birmingham on the M6, the car bonnet sucks the centre white line under, like flex winding on to a reel. Auditory smog saturates the air, but doesn't seem to pollute, mixing into the industrial liquidiser – a tune playing... like Kraftwerk!

But to the untrained or lazy ear their new LP, *Computer World*, especially the single, "Pocket Calculator", sounds like Metal Mickey after a university education.

The soundtrack of Germany's economic miracle, Kraftwerk has stripped itself to spluttering digital bleeps. The sense of expansive space and time of *Trans-Europe Express* has been replaced by a delight in home computing.

Kraftwerk sound closer to their recent imitators, but there are hidden layers, many complexities masterly concentrated. Computer sounds flutter in little repeating patterns. The words seem mundane, even morbidly preoccupied with computer love, but are perfectly timed stabs, crisp clues hanging precociously off the songs as an insight into Kraftwerk's wider philosophy.

A rumour circulating said Kraftwerk were planning to send lifelike dummies of themselves to the major European cities and then transmit the music from their studio by satellite to all places at the same time. In fact this would have been an extension of the idea they used to launch their *The Man-Machine* LP to the press – using dummies instead of physical presence. It proved technologically impossible on a grander scale, however.

Instead they spent three years dismantling – and working out how to reconstruct again – their studio. For this tour what we see on stage is a reconstruction of their working environment – a stunning length of switches, buttons and monitors which makes the Star Ship Enterprise look like a CB radio. It is all mirror-polished steel – humming a little menacingly as I inspect it on the stage of the Birmingham Odeon. Is it actually alive?!

Kraftwerk put on their three-dimensional communication for Birmingham – a little stiff at first, but eventually even robotic acting can't hide their delight at the energetic participation of the audience.

Florian Schneider, the other production man with Ralf Hütter, is extremely shy and his face folds up like an accordion when I try to introduce myself afterwards. He shirks a handshake and runs backwards in a hurry.

We walk to their hotel.

Karl Bartos, rhythm/percussion man, explains that at Liverpool the previous night people had mobbed them afterwards, touching and pushing them. Karl is light and springs along the pavement, younger, livelier than his years, often beaming with laughter and obviously very happy. He expresses surprise at seeing people dressed up so much, and he gets a hasty description of the new romantic fad. He seems surprised at the influence Kraftwerk have had on the electro-pop



landscape. Duran Duran, Depeche Mode Ultravox etc. Perhaps only Simple Minds and maybe Heaven 17 have substantially understood Kraftwerk structures.

We arrive at Kraftwerk's hotel, the Albany: all chrome tube furniture, dark walls and low ceilings.

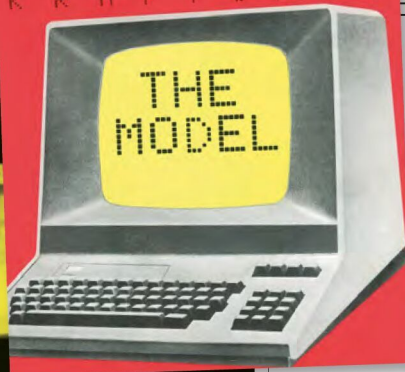
Ralf Hütter stops playing tunes on a pocket calculator (for the record company people) and joins me for a chat. He sits in his chair before me like school leavers are taught to do for job interviews – not too stiff – not too relaxed – legs slightly apart – hands held in his lap. His clothes are all black.

You are builders of sound, sound workers. How do you see the relationship between art and craftsmanship?

"To me they are one thing," he replies. "They shouldn't be separated, because in this specialised society where everything is falling apart, where doctors cannot talk to teachers and teachers cannot talk to space captains and everyone is separated, it doesn't need another group of people like artists. I think artists should bring people together. That is why we work with mathematicians, friends of ours."

I feel the force of his gaze.

You can use machines to break the system, to make music because machines/computers are controlling society. If you use them for artistic methods, you can break that. Do you think by extending the use of computers and making them



"We have confidence in them": Kraftwerk and their dummy doppelgangers at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, LA, July 30, 1981.

Are you limiting music's capability to be disordered?

"No, it has to do with making clear what really is and of being transparent. That is why we also have the neon lights behind us because there is nothing behind, it is making known that music as it is played today has this machine-like quality, but it is still pretending to be human, very emotional, which is all

rubbish because basically it is mechanical.

"We go for the direct mechanical. If something is mechanical it should be played as it is – mechanical. Music is a very reactionary artform as it is heard most of the time today. It is much more reactionary than other arts and literature, certainly.

"Machines are beautiful because they play so relaxed, you know. One of the highest goals of music is to play the right notes at the right time in a relaxed state of mind, and that is actually what machines do.

"In Germany we have big symphony orchestras, plus all the big opera houses which we have to pay for with our taxes. It is ridiculous, those people sitting down for bureaucratic music. There is a book from [Theodor W] Adorno, a German philosopher, about music in the bureaucratic society. It is all about these visions. Music is the expression of a bureaucratic society. It is not the music itself, not Beethoven or Mozart in person, but it is the people who play 100 years later.

"They are living museums, living marionettes, and it is the Leonard Bernsteins of the world who are holding back creativity."

Classical music is reactionary and your music is relevant to the modern age?

"The German word is zeitgeist, spirit of the time, and it is just breaking through to us. It is not really us who make the music, because it is not me personally or Karl or Florian or Wolfgang. It's just coming through to us. It is a result of research. I think it is more a scientific attitude. We sometimes call the studio a laboratory."

create, then in fact you are merely extending control and controlling creativity?

"No, it could be done." He straightens himself a little. "Or maybe some people are into that, but it is certainly not our trip, we try more to stimulate. In French it is called 'agent provocateur', and that is provocative, and that is a big danger to the bureaucratic system because if bureaucrats in their offices suddenly discover the creative impact of computers or of themselves, they would stop putting numbers in to control people and start making music."

He talks with only a faint German tinge – sometimes using words with similar meanings mistakenly. The words are clipped but not sharp – he uses conjunctions like "and" and "because" as a skating action, a delay to give him time to think. He also has a light humour, and a ravenous appetite for discussing their work.

Is your work a form of revolution?

"I think so – if you change people's behaviour, then everything crumbles, doesn't it? Structures crumble and Düsseldorf is the bureaucratic centre of German industry, so we have a very strong vision of these things. That is the big impact on our music. By being constantly confronted by these people, it is not a musical city, it is not an artistic city. You have to constantly fight it."

Is your music the music of a controlled society?

"By making transparent certain structures and bringing them to the forefront – that is a technique of provocation. First you have to acknowledge where you stand and what is happening before you can change it. I think we make things transparent, and with this transparency reactionary structures must fall."

By now the rest of the band have gathered, minus Florian, and also Emil Schult. Emil used to play guitar for Kraftwerk but gave up a musical role when they developed electronic ideas. He still writes words, for "Autobahn" and "Pocket Calculator" in the past, and does the artwork.

I turn to Ralf again.

Are you trying to get contact with each other through the machines?

"Yes, that is what it is all about, we are all interconnected. We are synchronised, the four of us, with a lot of cables between ourselves, so we can influence each others' programmes, plugged in, and it is a balance between four people."

You say we can send each other cassettes and communicate with each other that way. Isn't that the way a machine communicates? Does

a human being need to touch another human being? When you love another person, don't you need to show your affection?

"A lot more spiritual contact should be going on. People should be much more sensitive to mind contact and then, when they have established that, they can touch. Everybody knows it means so much more to touch someone you really love with a little finger than to do whatever you like with someone you don't care for."

When you leave your show, what is the relationship then between you? While they [the machines] play alone?

"We have confidence in them. They can carry on the show for the next minute or two."

If you are teaching them to do something like that, can that happen in other aspects of life? Run the civil service for instance?

"Certainty, certain parts, I think. We need to initiate them in the right direction, non-control function only. Observing people is not the function, but rather creatively they could play continuous computer parts of the city."

Could computers fight the next world war?

"Certainly, that is what people are doing all the time, in these games, sports, what do you call them?"

Space Invaders?

"Yes. I find that very sad because you could play so many interesting games other than shooting. That shows how sick they are: the only thing they think about is shooting each other. If they don't do it physically, then they do it mentally on a screen."

If computers fought the next world war, would anyone be killed?

"That's an interesting question." He turns to the colleagues gathered around him. "If computers fight the next world war, would anyone be killed?" he asks.

Emil is offended – he plainly doesn't see it as an interesting question. "I think the question evokes a negative fantasy. I think we should ask what else computers can make alive."

Ralf returns to the original question: "I think that is already taking place. Nuclear observance goes through computers. They were – I mean, the

first rise of the computer was in the last world war when the Germans, through the machines, er, put them into operations, and then the Americans had them.

"So they are all used by paranoid people, super paranoia, that is the term. Düsseldorf now has a police computer with all the streets and back entrances of all the banks."

Emil: "The computer doesn't take away the responsibility. If the computer had a soul it would probably decide not to kill. I think the desire to kill always comes from the man with the sick soul."

Can that somehow be changed

by reprogramming?

Emil: "Yes, by programming ourselves to a healthy way of thinking."

Do you think it is too late?

Ralf cuts in sharply: "No," he says, "otherwise we would stop making music. We would waste our time by travelling around and playing to people the wrong things." ▲

"IF A COMPUTER
HAD A SOUL, IT
WOULD PROBABLY
DECIDE NOT
TO KILL"
EMIL SCHULT

10 _ELECTRIC CAFÉ

KRAFTWERK TAKE A COFFEE BREAK, AND THE WORLD CATCHES UP. THOUGHT TEPID AT THE TIME, IT NOW WARRANTS REINVESTIGATION. BY PIERS MARTIN

RELEASED: NOVEMBER 10, 1986

THROUGHOUT the 1970s, Kraftwerk had grown used to conducting their affairs on their own terms. Across a run of groundbreaking releases, from 1974's *Autobahn* to 1981's *Computer World*, the group had used the latest technology to develop a new musical language with which they expressed their serene vision for social harmony and universal communication, each album exploring another grand concept that added to their own story. By setting the agenda, the robots appeared pretty much untouchable during this imperial phase.

Always one step ahead, they operated at a different level to their peers, so much so that even a fairly clunky concept such as the advent of the digital age became, in *Computer World*, a thrilling glimpse into the future as Kraftwerk crunched the numbers to forge the prototype for electro and techno. All while persuading a public still suspicious of the power of the personal computer that "it's *more fun to compute*" by illustrating the ways in which the microchip was making daily life more appealing. All this some three years before the launch of Apple and IBM's first home computers in 1984.

By the time *Electric Café* was released in November 1986, everything had changed for Kraftwerk. Or, more to the point, everything had changed *except* Kraftwerk, who'd inched forward in Kling Klang isolation while the rest of the music world had caught up with them long

ago. Once new portable electronic instruments became relatively affordable at the turn of the decade – Roland's TB-303 bass line synthesiser retailed at £238, though their 808 drum machine was a bit dearer – synth-pop became the dominant style and a swathe of acts indebted to Kraftwerk began mimicking their heroes on a fraction of their budget. From enthusiastic acolytes such as OMD, Depeche Mode and The Human League to Gary Numan, whose 1979 No 1 "Cars" entertained Kraftwerkian notions of modernism, the cultural shift to mass domestic production that Kraftwerk predicted on *Computer World* had taken place and the charts were full of acts that sounded like the robots.

Not that Kraftwerk appeared particularly intimidated by these British upstarts, or "that silly English pop scene, with silly lyrics", as Karl Bartos described it, but Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider would have been acutely aware of the competition. In the US, producers such as Cybotron and The Egyptian Lover embraced the electro style – Cybotron's "Clear" even sampled "Hall Of Mirrors" – and based their entire sound on the cold, hard machine funk of *Computer World*'s "Numbers". By the time *Electric Café*

emerged, there had been 12 editions of the *Street Sounds Electro* compilation in the UK, records that introduced electro to thousands of British teens, suggesting the genre had peaked in popularity by 1986.

By Kraftwerk's standards, a five-year gap between albums was unheard of, and it was

primarily a consequence of Hütter's perfectionism. In 1983 he delivered a finished album called *Techno Pop* to EMI that was *Electric Café* in all but name and which included "Tour De France" as the final track. This album had a cover, loosely based on the "Tour De France" artwork, as well as a catalogue number. EMI even placed ads in magazines for the release, due that summer. But Hütter pulled the album, concerned that the material, recorded in analogue, might sound dated in an increasingly digital world, and looked to revise the tracks.

Additional factors also played a part in the record's delay. Kraftwerk would have been intrigued by the New York electro-funk bomb "Planet Rock", a new style of electronic hip-hop credited to Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force and produced by Arthur Baker, which came out in the summer of 1982. Although the track

BY 1979,
THE CHARTS
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ROBOTS



sampled the sequenced beat from “Numbers” and the icy melody from “Trans-Europe Express” without permission – a state of affairs soon rectified when Tommy Boy agreed to pay Kraftwerk one dollar for every copy sold – Hütter would have been impressed by Baker’s innovative production and the way he fused the swagger of early US rap with mannered European synth-pop. This approach likely gave Hütter confidence to roll with the heavily rhythmic first side of *Electric Café*, which flows from “Boing Boom Tschak” into “Techno Pop” and “Musique Non Stop”, as if on an industrial conveyor belt.

An obsessive cyclist, Hütter suffered a serious accident during the early production of *Electric Café* when he came off his bike by a stretch of the Rhine and hit his head on concrete. He was taken to hospital where he spent four days in a coma, according to Wolfgang Flür, quoted in David Buckley’s Kraftwerk biography, *Publikation*. Hütter later played down the severity of the fall – “I got a new operation, I got a new head,” he told *The Guardian* in 2009 – but at the time Karl Bartos saw things differently. “It might sound pretentious to say today, but after the bike accident Hütter was not the same,” he told Buckley. “He changed.” How this affected the progress of the album it is hard to say – perhaps Hütter became more protective of this material, a sign that he was unsure of its quality, or he now felt nervous about the idea of releasing it when he knew Kraftwerk had lost their edge.

At the same time, Hütter seems to have been flattered by the VIP attention he would receive from time to time, now that Kraftwerk were part of the fabric of pop. Around 1985 he was courted by Michael Jackson, who wanted permission to use the multi-tracks of *The Man-Machine*. Initially the request was turned down by Hütter and Schneider – just as they’d snubbed Bowie and Elton John – but Pascal Bussy reveals in his book *Kraftwerk: Man, Machine And Music* that Hütter did meet Jackson in a private building the singer owned in New York to play him the tapes, which he carried around in a plastic bag, though no formal agreement was reached between the pair.

THE CRITICS’ VERDICT

“They’re cleaner and better than you’d imagine – but what really seduces is not the rhythm or the regularity but the glimmers, the blinks, the related background events, minor clockwork details, refractions of facial twitches. Ping! Every surface is primed and finished. There are no hooks, no snags. No anguish. No doubt. Perhaps this is it for Kraftwerk. They’ve furnished us with a best-ever hygienic return to perfect, Platonic forms.”

**DAVID STUBBS,
MELODY MAKER,
NOVEMBER 8, 1986**

“If the first side usefully supplies a diagram of the dance circuit connecting themselves, hip-hop and Japanese technopop, Side Two’s ballads reveal their essential sweetness. The novelty-fixated montage of operator messages and ping-pong jingles of ‘Telephone Call’ is undeniably affecting, once Hütter connects with lines about the distance between lovers.”

**BIBA KOPE, NME,
NOVEMBER 8, 1986**

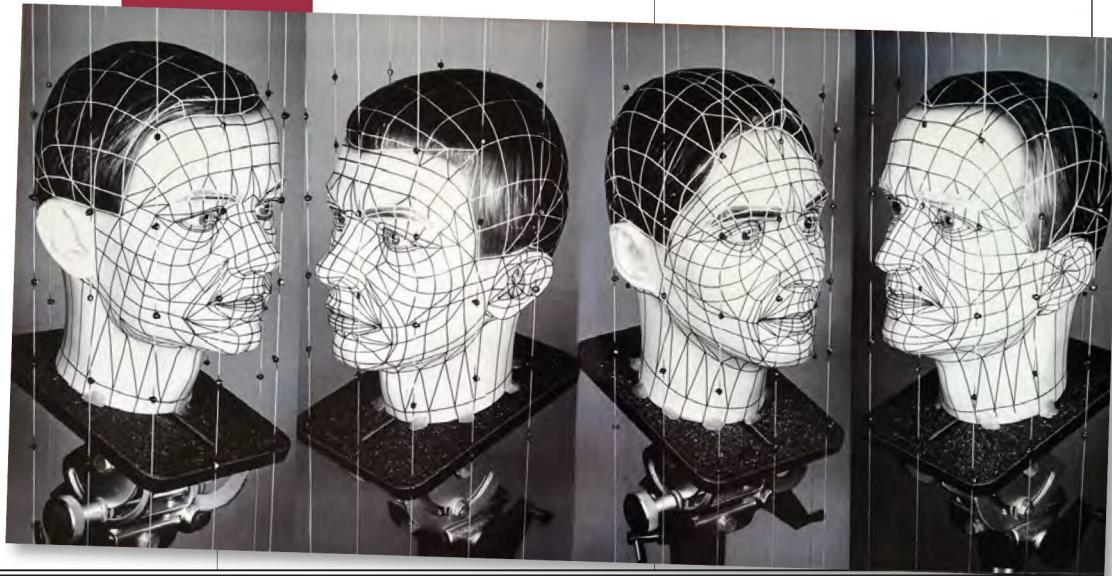
In a bid to future-proof the album, the group spent three months in New York mixing the tracks at Right Track Studio with François Kevorkian and Ron St Germain, two well-regarded producer-engineers with solid dance credentials who’d helped fine-tune major albums by the likes of Mick Jagger and Jean-Michel Jarre. The French synth pioneer’s excellent 1984 LP, *Zoolook*, with its innovative mix of layered vocals and cut-up ethnic rhythms, could have been a useful reference for *Electric Café*. Although Kevorkian had earlier mixed the single “Tour De France”, this was the first time Kraftwerk had worked outside Kling Klang and for Bartos the results disappointed. “We spent three months in New York for mixing, but when it was finished nobody was really happy with it. So it was done again,” he told Bussy. In New York’s nightclubs, the group were exposed to the latest freestyle, hi-NRG and house cuts, which can’t have done their confidence any good.

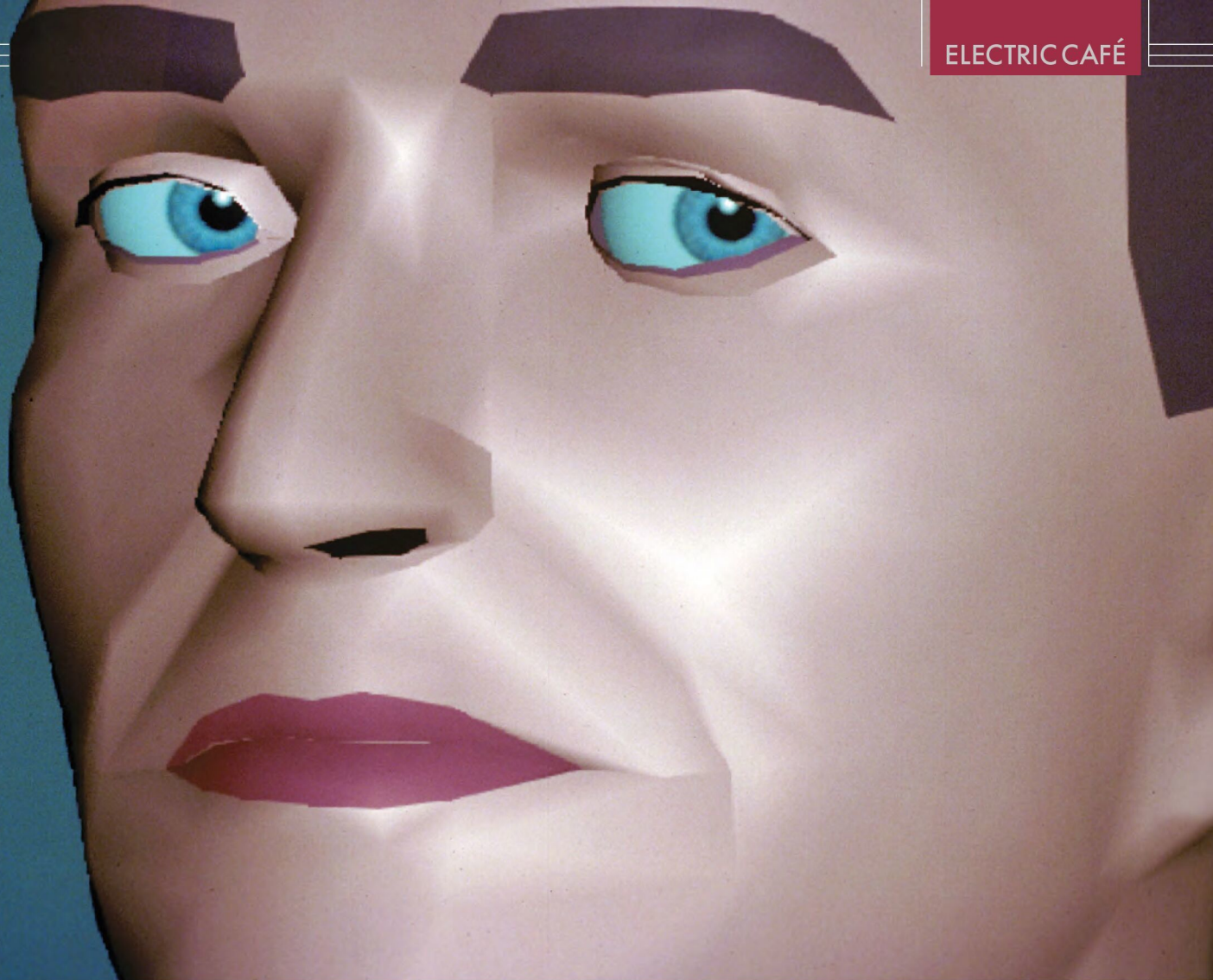
The underlying issue with *Electric Café* is that the overall concept for the record isn’t as convincing as the well-rounded themes of previous Kraftwerk records, which balanced romantic nostalgia with futuristic ideas. The group had been toying with the notion of a global café since 1976 as many of their meetings took place in the coffee houses of Düsseldorf. Plus, they were taken by a 1927 silent film starring Marlene Dietrich called *Café Elektric*. The idea of a space where the world might converse as one and exchange ideas today inevitably conjures the internet, but there’s nothing in the album’s lyrics to suggest the group had this in mind

in the early ’80s. Hütter seemed more concerned with avoiding any New Age connotations the title might throw up – he had no time for that style of muzak – but even so, visiting a café is a passive act and Kraftwerk had always been about forward motion. In the end, only the title track, with its synthesised voices speaking French and Italian and its supple funk, adheres to the concept.

Quaint though the original title “Techno Pop” sounds today, it suits the faceless mechanical groove of much of the record. Considering this aspect, Bartos felt the group had lost its touch. “Listen to the earlier *Trans-Europe Express*, listen to how warm it is, how human,” he told a Swedish documentary in 2001. “On *Electric Café* the band placed technology ahead of the music, and that was the mistake.” Yet with nothing radically new to say and with profound belief in the quality of their equipment, this was a chance for Kraftwerk to finally let the machines do the talking as they became slaves to the rhythm.

THE onomatopoeic opener “Boing Boom Tschak” distils their essence in three minutes, a Dadaist doodle that traces the vox-funk outline of the Art Of Noise’s “Close (To The Edit)”. This segues into “Techno Pop” which layers synthetic strings – a sound liberally used on Derrick May’s Detroit techno touchstone “Strings Of Life” a year later – and pointillist piano on the same groove as Hütter and Bartos scroll through the percussion settings, slicing and dicing with practised economy. “Musique Non Stop” continues the theme, as a synthetic female voice – the first woman on a Kraftwerk record – extols the body-popping virtues of “*industrial rhythms all around*”, the beats bubbling beautifully. As much as these tracks glisten and shimmer as if in a showroom, there’s no urgency here, these sedate cuts are





not designed for the dancefloor, or if they are, the authors clearly haven't been out much. It's café music, to be admired and consumed with coffee and chocolate ice-cream.

Karl Bartos croons the gentle sentiments of "The Telephone Call", its sterile melody a ghost of "The Model", his weirdly banal words offering few signs of life: "You're so close but far away/I call you up all night and day." It's almost a pastiche of Kraftwerk and in a way embodies all that was not right at Kling Klang: a group trapped in their illustrious past, rehashing their finer moments only to find their shortcomings exposed. The 2009 album remaster also includes "House Phone", the flipside of "The Telephone Call", which sees the gang roll up their sleeves to give the original a vigorous rubdown, some welcome aggression that doesn't necessarily add much to the overall impression of the album but shows they're capable of letting loose when the pressure is off.

At least "Sex Object" is enjoyably perverse, much like the thought of the fusty Hütter engaging in any kind of kinky activity. Over

yearning string swirls and plush bass, he assumes a role, drolly singing, "I don't want to be your sex object/You turn me on then you forget," before the second part of the track breaks down into an extended Max Headroom beatbox jam. Here Kraftwerk sound of the time, limited by technology, and where before they might work to make the track sparkle with counter-melodies, now they rummage in their hardware to stretch an idea into what amounts to a Yello B-side.

Stranded in Kling Klang with one foot in the past and one in the present, Kraftwerk appeared past their prime when *Electric Café*

finally came out, its difficult gestation evident in the group's comparatively clunky compositions. In the UK the album could only graze the Top 60 as synth-pop fans turned to the likes of the Pet Shop Boys and Berlin, whose Giorgio Moroder-produced "Take My Breath Away" was number one the week of *Electric Café*'s release.

The group desperately needed a reboot, and as they retreated to Kling Klang to lick their wounds, Bartos and Flür quit, leaving Hütter and Schneider to assess Kraftwerk's future, just like in the old days of *Ralf And Florian*. Certainly it's strange that *Electric Café* is still their most compelling body of work since 1986, but it's testament to the way Hütter has managed their career since then that it's viewed as a charming curiosity rather than an act of hapless self-sabotage. 🌟

IT'S STRANGE
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SINCE 1986

...SLEEVENOTES, SLEEVENOTES, SLEEVENOTES, SLEEVENOTE
...ELECTRIC CAFÉ, ELECTRIC CAFÉ, ELECTRIC CAFÉ.....

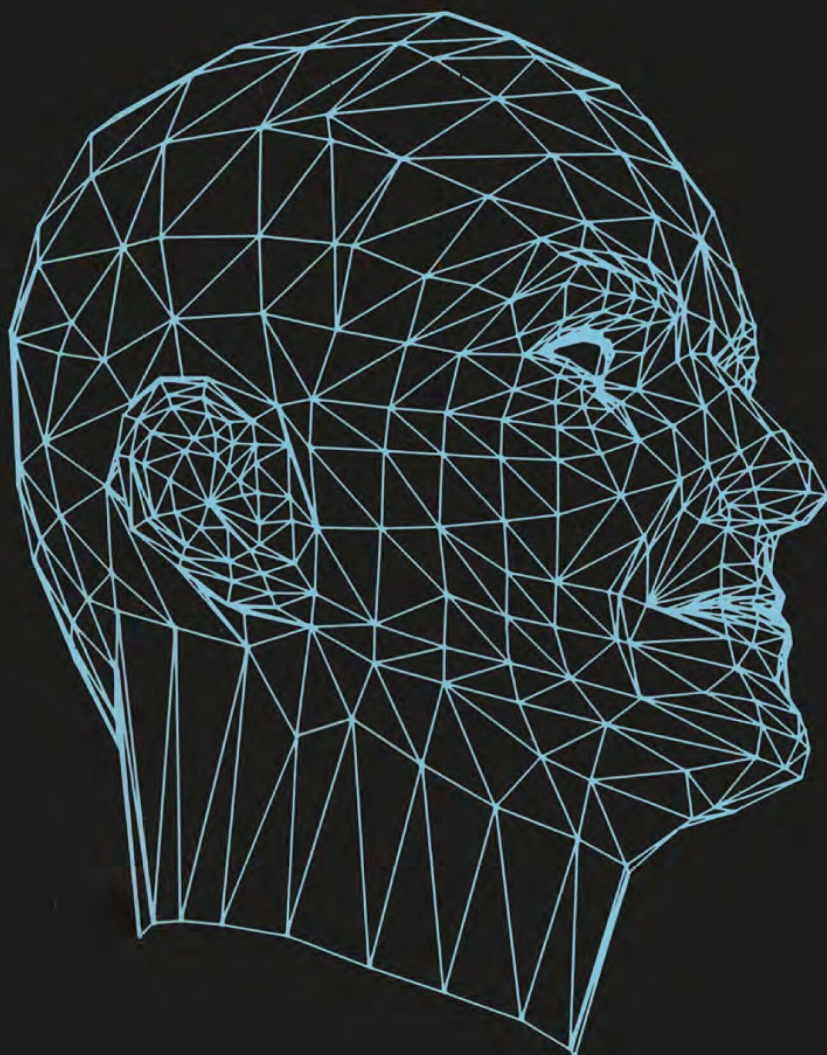
1. Boing Boom Tschak *****
2. Techno Pop *****
3. Musique Non Stop *****
4. The Telephone Call *****
5. House Phone *****
6. Sex Object *****

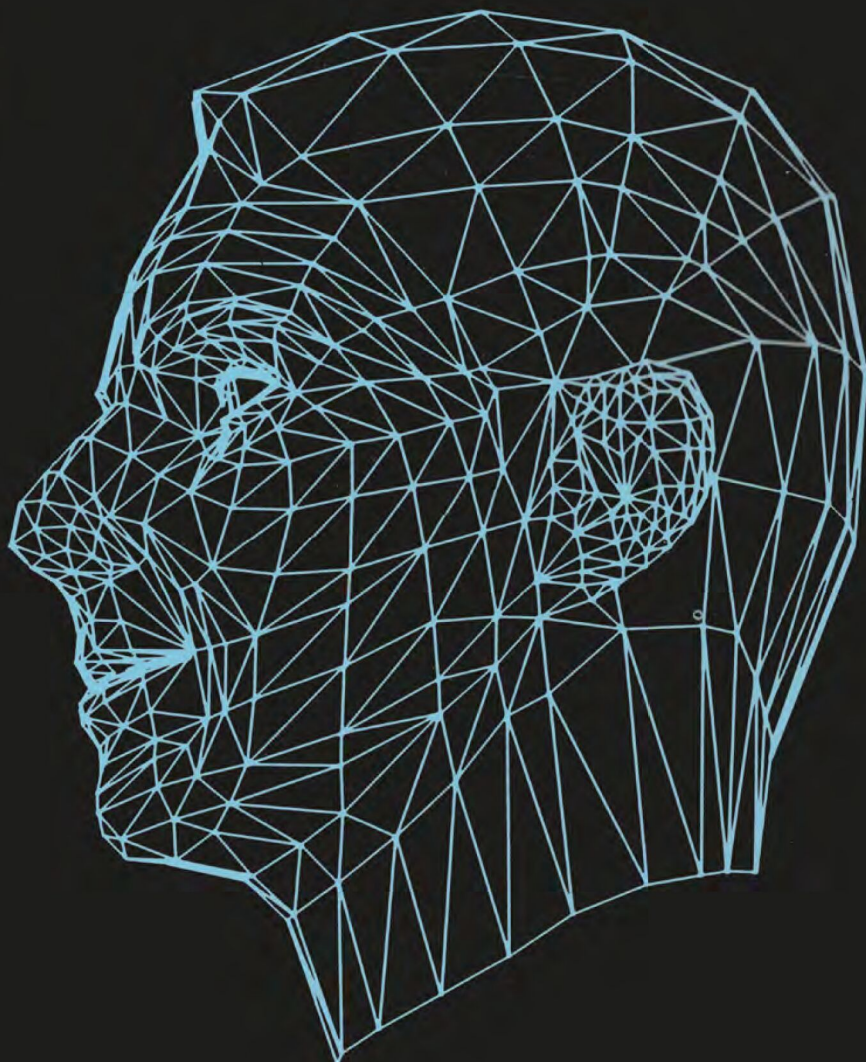
7. *Electric Café* *****
LABEL: EMI/Kling Klang Produkt
PRODUCED BY: Kraftwerk
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang Studio,
Düsseldorf; mixed at Right Track
Studio, New York

PERSONNEL: Hütter (vocals, keys,
electronics), Schneider (vocoder,
sound design), Bartos (electronic
perc), Flür (no instruments listed)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 58;
US 156

"WE TRY FOR A SORT OF 3-D EFFECT"

With new album *Electric Café* in the shops, RALF HÜTTER meets *NME* to discuss performance, robot clothing, films and their "androgynous" presentation. "The guitar is an ersatz type of penis," he tells DESSA FOX, "and Prince has shown this."





"WE WORK IN
SOUNDS, WE
WORK IN WORDS,
WE WORK IN
VIDEO, WE WORK
IN PLASTIC..."



A NEW Kraftwerk LP has arrived, a spacious but wistful thing that mixes romance with static interference; it sounds like Wagner in an airport lounge, trying to ring an escort service.

Electric Café – Kraftwerk's fifth album since 1974's

Autobahn – contains more of their patented Industrielle Volksmusik: songs of innocence and experience shot through with dial tones, pocket calculators, lights, dance, lovers distant as satellites and the smell of expressways in the morning. What better lyrics for atomic rhythm and blues than "BOOM, TSCHAK, BOOM"?

Here on the second floor of the EMI building, PR people are tapping their feet to "Techno Pop"'s glacial bomp. A few Christmas decorations shiver on the wall. Across the room Ralf Hütter is the very picture of composure. His parted, trimmed hair is as neat as two wafers, his handshake hovers around the 98.6 mark, and his black sweater and trousers are irreproachably versatile, suitable for office or living room. When I ask him if he's pleased with the album, he pulls carefully on one thumb and replies, "I don't know." Outside, a siren accelerates down Oxford Street. Hütter holds up a happy digit. "Wait," he smiles, "someone is playing a rhythm track out there."

FIFTEEN years ago, four ex-classical musicians from Düsseldorf took a new god for a spin down the *Autobahn* in Ralf Hütter's old grey Volkswagen. ("In the past people said that God could hear everything. Today the tape recorder is the new God." Florian Schneider, 1977.) With the plastic god dangling out the window, Messrs Hütter, Schneider, Bartos and Flür taped the sounds our indifferent ears filter out: receding traffic, random honks, compressed air, vibrating lungs, trembling radio. Back at the newly formed Kling Klang studios they reproduced these noises electronically, and thus was born *Autobahn*, without which we'd all be listening to New Christy Minstrels records.

Kraftwerk were the first pop people to demonstrate that the invention of the tape recorder was also the invention of a new musical language. Hütter and Schneider weren't interested in blank tape as a means of embalming the past (which would be the good German thing to do; to put Bach in a better box), but as a means of scanning the present. *Autobahn* was the sound of diligent European craftsmen landing majestically and unhysterically onto 20th-century tundra, a vast cool place of factories and cars and cameras and meshed, invisible waveforms. Being romantics, the explorers turned chaos into order; here was a record that not only introduced the listener to some fairly bizarre noises – say, the ripped-air effect cars make on leaving tunnels – but cushioned these noises on pastoral melodies. And this from four nightclubbers who can still remember all the lyrics to Barry White songs.

Between then and now came the chromium views of *Radioactivity* (1975), *Trans-Europe Express* (1977), *The Man-Machine* (1978), *Computer World* (1981), and a one-off composed for the French bicycle race, the 12" "Tour De



Particle people: Kraftwerk promote their fifth album, *Radio-Activity*, 1975

France". All of these are spectacularly primitive albums, not in the sense of simple or minimal but perfectly economical; Kraftwerk get to where they want to go without resorting to aural furry dice. In the wake of each LP the band left countless brilliant techniques – new ways of using electronic percussion, new ways of using deep-focus mixing, new ways of reducing songs to slivers, new ways of democratising computers, and most of all new ways of looking in the mirror. Kraftwerk are almost single-handedly responsible for one of the great musical icons of the '80s – the EuroAlien. In 1980 every synthesiser-carrying Mode/Minds/Foxx/DAF on the block yearned to be enigmatic molecules on the great *Autobahn* of life; updated Kerouacs who'd swapped a Greyhound bus-pass for a Corbijn portrait by a cenotaph. Kraftwerk gave us the Concorde version of that old saw, the Disaffected Guy.

But this is looking back, something Kraftwerk rarely do. The abovementioned heroic effect would provoke shrugs in the KK studios, being just another notch in the balance between man and machine. The band view themselves as robotniks, workers in sound rather than musicians. They remain firm friends with their technologies ("We are their colleagues. We play the machines, but they also play us") and the studio is something they can get drunk with, or aloof with, or do the hippy hippy shake with.

Is there a reason why one side of the LP seems very less-is-more, and the other side lush?

It's not pre-planned; it's just a result of the flow of bits of tape edited together in a certain way. We try not to be too consistent – sometimes we're quite chaotic and other times very organised. Also we don't play one role 24 hours a day. We work in sounds, we work in words, we work in video, we work in plastic, so we don't think in terms of specialisation. For example, if you feel like taking photos you just get your camera and move your little finger. It's good; it only takes one centimetre of physical action to be a photographer.

Is this a good thing – that technology does most of the work? Some people say it's too easy, that you get a lot of boring, technically correct photos.

It's more what's in the picture – it's where you direct it, it's the brains behind the stance. In terms of music, in the old days a pianist would have to practise eight hours a day just to keep the fingers supple. But we don't need to worry about that; if we want to play fast we program for speed – we increase the beats per minute or something. So what it takes is input. And then you have the question: are we being programmed ourselves? By educational systems, by parents...

By sex differences...

Oh certainly. Immediately, behaviour patterns are

Es wird immer weitergeh'n –
Musik als Träger von Ideen

KRAFTWERK TECHNO POP



think there has been too much concentration on the differences between the sexes. This seems to be another form of nostalgia, where people want the comfort of divisions. Actually, what we've noticed in the studio is that we pass through all sorts of roles. Sometimes we can be childish, needing to learn, or we can be fatherly, and taking the part of teachers. And the situations change emotionally all the time.

In 1981 you referred to yourselves as "the second generation of electronic music". Is hip-hop the third? Well, we are also in there with our use of pocket calculators, and sampling, and scratching. So there is a wider extension, but not really a break.

Everyone's still waiting for something new to happen musically – 'everyone' meaning 'especially journalists'. Maybe we'll go back to listening to acoustic guitars. But that's just a psychological desire at work, the desire for old things, like dreaming of an old friend. Nostalgia means you are uncomfortable with the present; the trick is to select from the present and look forward. For example, the good thing about electronic music now is that the whole field is so much wider, with hip-hop and so on, and as a result people seem to be getting away from the cult of the individual. I think people are back to music and sounds, and not so much concerned with this raving personal cult stuff.

Could the new thing be happening somewhere else? In books, or in films? You mean the zeitgeist... the human being has different senses: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, etc.

"SYNTHESISERS,
ARE AN
ANDROGYNOUS
MEDIUM, MORE
SO THAN PLAYING
GUITAR"

Sometimes the spirit of the age will move from, say, ears to eyes – for example in Germany film was very prominent in the '30s. And then other times music is dominant, like in the '60s and '70s, and literature is mute.

What will your next stage show look like? Will you be using the dummies again?

I think the dummies will be travelling with us because we have become friends, and they are very popular. They get a lot of kisses, they take good pictures, and they can stand for hours and hours in the studio without complaining. And then they get into their coffins at night... they like to travel.

Probably they're always bothering you for new clothes?

Oh yes – but we have to get them new clothes, because the old ones rub off.

Your last show here – I think it was 1979, at Hammersmith Odeon – was technologically stunning, with the programmed dummies and the use of video projection. Do you feel the pressure to come up with something equally innovative next time?

But in that show we used pocket calculators, which you could get around the corner; it was just the context we used them that maybe seemed unusual. In a concert people are surprised to see pocket calculators, whereas in an office they would be bored. I remember once in Düsseldorf we gave the calculators to people in the audience, so that they could manipulate the sound. Some of them were happy, others seemed frightened; they didn't want to touch it. The responses differ a lot – we're not dealing in hardware exclusively, but in software too... but to answer your question: we don't worry too much about bringing new spectacles. We just keep on going. Sometimes innovation doesn't move as quickly, and sometimes it accelerates.

You've talked about embracing a "technological lifestyle". But, pushed to the

imposed on us from birth: the colour blue for boys, rose for girls. I mean, can you imagine a system that uses two different kinds of schools? Crazy. It has to do with fear of the sexes from both sides. But the origin is that most men are afraid of women.

Uh-oh.

Oh yes, especially in the music business. Where does this whole macho posing thing come from? I find it very interesting, for example, when somebody is playing in a studio and girls come in – no, let's not say girls, let's say females – when females come into this very male environment, with male engineers, the music changes.

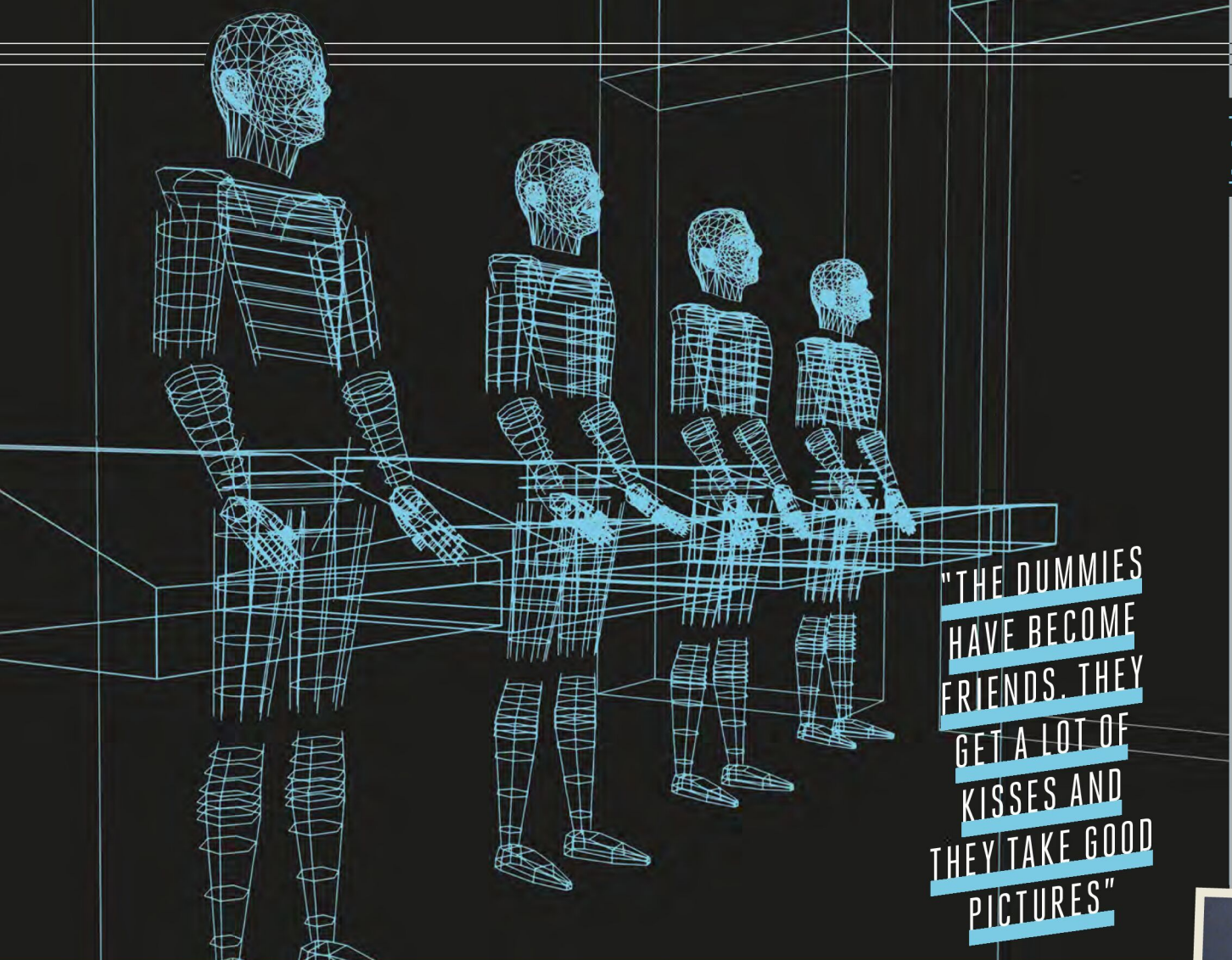
But Kraftwerk has been looked at as very much a boys' club.

We are more androgynous. We just happen to be born with the physical appearance of males. But synthesisers, or electronic waves, are an androgynous medium, more so than playing the guitar. The guitar is an ersatz type of penis, and Prince has shown this. We have been playing synthesisers for 16 years. Also I



From Kraftwerk's
"Telephone Call", 1986





**"THE DUMMIES
HAVE BECOME
FRIENDS. THEY
GET A LOT OF
KISSES AND
THEY TAKE GOOD
PICTURES"**

limit, this translates as one person sitting in a chair, with all sorts of fantasy toys within arm's reach. Does technology create isolation?

The opposite. It could be that with all these toys there will be more humans communicating with each other in more ways. Males and females being more social, using anything from tape recorders to electronic games. With us, the potential is there for one person to do the work. One person could have everything digitised, and send everyone else home – but instead we choose to work together.

I suppose I'm thinking of Americans, who seem to cream themselves with naff ego fantasies...

Yes, like Howard Hughes. Maybe Huxley was right – the thing that's going to do us in isn't surveillance or segregation or repressive legislation, but a lifetime of swallowing consumer sweeties, which makes us stupid. I think you must develop a counter-creativity. For example, we work in this field of entertainment, but we try and create small spaces for people to plug themselves in, to use their imaginations. The creative consumer is the new man-machine; you pick up something from your information system, you have a certain time to digest it, and then you act. I mean, you can't stuff yourself for 24 hours. I don't know... the whole idea of media adoration we are not into at all; media should be on a bread-

and-butter level. Certainly in Germany, as opposed to America, there seems to be a great deal of awareness. The TV critique by [Neil] Postman [*Amusing Ourselves To Death*] was very high on the best-seller lists for over a year. And people are conscious of mass communication from the Nazi days, which is when the whole thing started for us. So Germany has a very informed media background. Also, there is a strong counterculture to conventional media, both on a personal and organisational level.

Such as the Green Party...

Yes... In Germany we have rockets in stereo, East and West. The left channel has the SS20s and the right channel is the Cruise missiles. In Bonn there is a performance group that does everything from pantomime to cabaret; some people call this group the government. They appear on TV and in front of mics in suits and ties, and make speeches, and move their mouths, and people applaud. A part of the Green Party perform in this theatre, which is the theatre of democracy. But subversive groups make little guerrilla actions at

night, like cutting electrical connections. There are lots of activities at different levels. And since Chernobyl all sorts of people are waking up – I mean you go into the supermarket and the product on the shelf doesn't say "milk" any more, it says, "Includes radiation percentage".

Why have Kraftwerk made so few soundtracks for feature films?

It's because we don't have a telephone. Actually, most of the time we just don't like the projects; usually the plots are ridiculous to us. We're not interested in the whole literary thing. Anyway, since *Autobahn*, a film sensibility is built into the music; we try for a sort of 3-D effect. Our music can be seen, so the film part would have to complement this. But we've done some things – we did pieces for the British director Christopher Petit, in *Radio On*. And two films for Fassbinder – *Chinese Roulette* and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

And now some producers have approached us for a film of Tour De France, a documentary on the race. We already did one record for this, but perhaps there will be another.

What do Kraftwerk do at night?

Dance around with our eyes closed. ▲



reflect light. I was interested in trying to get a 3-D model of a body to move within a computer. I worked with dancer Twyla Tharp on making a digital St Catherine that would dance and perform, and I composited it with live dance for a full-length video. That was the first time people had seen a computer model on TV, but the idea of doing a four-minute video using the computer in any way was just crazy; it could take one or two hours just to render one frame and you need about 30 frames a second. But when MTV started coming out and these other music video channels, I thought, 'I could make these short films and get a great audience.' I made two videos for Lynn Goldsmith's salbum *Will Powers: Dancing For Mental Health* and both of them were big hits on MTV, they were so unusual. At some point Kraftwerk had seen those and knew about this lab. So they contacted me and we talked about making a video for their new album.

For me this was a dream come

"TO DO THIS
KIND OF WORK
YOU HAD TO BE
INCREDIBLY
OBSSSSIVE"
REBBECA ALLEN

INTERVIEW: MARK BEAUMONT

Manmachine:
Rebecca Allen in the
process of digitising
one of the Kraftwerk
mannequin heads,
and below building
up a 3-D view



11 _ THE MIX

WAS IT A GREATEST HITS? A REMIX ALBUM? NEW 'WERK OR OLD? KRAFTWERK CONFOUND PURISTS BY REVISITING THEIR PAST TO FIND A ROAD AHEAD. **BY MICHAEL HANN**

RELEASED: JUNE 11, 1991

It wasn't a greatest hits; nor was it a new album. It wasn't remixes; nor was it original material. In an age when bands – Squeeze and Def Leppard among them – re-record their old material to gain control of their publishing, *The Mix* doesn't seem that extraordinary. In 1991, though, it did.

Here was a group famed for being avatars of the future looking directly to the past, taking a selection of their best-known songs (but not "The Model", their biggest hit single) and one track few people knew ("Dentaku", the Japanese version of "Pocket Calculator", which had been only a US B-side in 1981) and remaking them in versions that were different enough to the originals to irk the purists, but close enough to serve the purpose EMI wanted: a de facto best-of-Kraftwerk.

When *The Mix* emerged in June 1991, it had been four-and-a-half years since the previous Kraftwerk album, the underwhelming *Electric Cafe*. That wouldn't have been an issue – *Electric Cafe* itself had come five-and-a-half-years after *Computer World* – but it meant *The Mix* was released to a world that had been starved of

memorable new Kraftwerk, and of live performances. For them to break their silence with an album that was neither fish nor fowl seemed to many fans at best a disappointment, at worst a betrayal. The endless procrastination didn't sit well with long-term member Karl Bartos, either: he left the group during the making of *The Mix* ("I can remember saying to Ralf, 'It's like I have this Jumbo Jet in the garden, but it never takes off,'" he later recalled).

The reason for the gap and the reason for *The Mix* were the same. Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider had been renovating Kling Klang studios, and digitising all their old analogue tapes. In the process, they began sampling themselves, then remaking old songs around those samples, adding new music. "We used all of our back catalogue from the last 20 years, sampling the original analogue sounds from the 16-track

master tapes," Hütter told *Keyboard* magazine in 1991. "We chose those sounds we thought were unique, or irreplaceable, or perhaps just good in shape, and then others we changed or altered.

We were interested in using original sounds from way back, from our old homemade analogue machines, adapting everything technically to the 1990s. It's just a mix of sounds sampled from the old masters, plus newly generated electronic, completely synthetic sounds. Everything is reassembled. Mixing, for us, is the art form of making music today."

"Adapting everything technically to the 1990s" is the key phrase there. Kraftwerk had long been heralded as

visionaries and prophets, foreseeing the future not of music, but of humanity's interaction with technology (not for nothing was their best-known early UK TV appearance on

**DIGITISING ALL
THEIR OLD
ANALOGUE TAPES.
THEY BEGAN
SAMPLING
THEMSELVES**



Tomorrow's World). But they were never fetishising the future itself so much as being as up to date as possible: when they were singing about home computers, the first home computers were on the market; the pocket calculator was part of everyday life when the song of that name was a single. A few years before then, their vision of transport might have sounded futuristic musically, but they were still singing about trains and cars, not spaceships and jetpacks.

But by 1991 those songs that had once been at the bleeding edge sounded almost quaint. The subjects no longer dazzled – society and politics were changing faster than consumer technology, what with the fall of both apartheid and the Soviet bloc. In some cases, their songs had been overtaken: the original “Radioactivity” had initially referred to both the radio as well as to radioactivity, and it had an air of benign but distant concern to it. But that was 1975; by 1991 the world had seen, first, the partial reactor meltdown at Three Mile Island, then the disaster at Chernobyl. Benign but distant concern no longer fitted the times.

Music, too, had changed. The run of albums plundered for the new recordings on *The Mix* had been made between 1975 and 1981, for most of which time they had been musical outliers (when “Computer Love” came out in 1981, the “Trans-Europe Express”-sampling “Planet Rock” was still a year away). Come the ‘90s, though, electronic music was on its way to becoming the lingua franca of mainstream pop. House music was doing what the electronic pop groups of the early ‘80s had not managed, and beginning the long process of pushing the guitar to the sidelines of the charts.

Kraftwerk were the grandfathers of that, and for new listeners coming to electronic music, they probably sounded like grandfathers. The sound of Kraftwerk, at least post-*Autobahn*, had largely been sharp corners and hard edges, but electronic music had moved past that: it had become sensual, and Kraftwerk, whatever their virtues, were rarely sensual. There was a hint of grandad-can’t-set-the-video about the modernisation of Kling Klang, too. Having spent, late in 1986, a reputed million dollars on a New England Digital Synclavier II, Hütter and Schneider discovered it was almost impossible to use, and so hired Fritz Hilpert – a studio engineer rather than a musician – to operate it, and to sample the old digital multitrack tapes. *The Mix* may not have been Hilpert’s idea, but it was Hilpert digitising the back catalogue – assembling the data – that made it possible.

But why *The Mix*? Leaving aside the obvious observation that Hütter and Schneider clearly had no inclination to make new music – which led to Bartos’s departure, then it’s worth considering the two explanations offered by Uwe Schütte in *Kraftwerk: Future Music From Germany*. Perhaps, he suggests, they had already been overtaken by pop music, and there was no point (and perhaps no dignity) in joining a race with it. After all, the old stagger fighting it out with

pop’s young pretenders rarely scores more than a Pyrrhic victory. Alternatively, he suggests, Kraftwerk had already won. Having transformed music so thoroughly, there was simply no need for them to be new any longer: from now on their work in progress would be the maintenance and/or reanimation of their past.

That Kraftwerk would not accept being beholden to their history was evident from the opening of *The Mix*. “The Robots” was transformed (from here on the track would become the group’s theme tune, more or less, as the

robots themselves, having appeared on the cover of *The Mix*, became a fixture of the live show). Here was the immediate evidence of the sharp corners and hard edges being sanded down, and the music being reconfigured for an audience accustomed to the music that had been coming out of Detroit and Chicago. The pace was quickened, the main keyboard hook altered so it was no longer so harshly on-the-beat, and instead floated above. Kraftwerk, for the first time, sounded indisputably as though they were making music for the dancefloor, rather than the laboratory. At just shy of six minutes in came a burbling, syncopated synth pattern that was explicitly indebted to house music. If Kraftwerk no longer sounded as though they could have come from no other place than Düsseldorf, they now sounded universal in a way they never had before.

The new sound of Kraftwerk was a shock not just to fans, but to people close to them. “I wasn’t sure about *The Mix*,” said their long-time artist and lyricist Emil Schult. “Would Leonardo Da Vinci have taken the *Mona Lisa* back and painted over her? I guess not. ‘Autobahn’ didn’t need a remix by Kraftwerk.” But Schult had selected his metaphor carelessly: the *Mona Lisa* had not been painted over. The old songs were still there, but now they were supplemented.

Even for defenders of *The Mix*, though, it would be hard to argue that everything on it worked perfectly. “Computer World”, for example, loses the

delicate dreaminess of the original in its transition to something more propulsive and kinetic. Where it had sounded once like a benevolent dream of cyberspace, the new version sounded more like the IT techs hurrying to their coffee break. “Dentakku”, meanwhile, seemed a wholly pointless addition, though evidently not to Hütter, given the song also entered live rotation. “Pocket Calculator”

neither gained nor lost in the transition – always jaunty, it became even jauntier.

Blasphemy though it might be to say, *The Mix*’s central trio of “Autobahn”, “Radioactivity” and “Trans-Europe Express” was where the album really flew. “Autobahn”, genuinely, did not suffer from losing 14 of its minutes. The nine-and-a-half that remained still felt like enough of a journey to satisfy most listeners, if not the purists. And, six-and-a-half minutes in, it offered the funniest moment in the Kraftwerk catalogue, when the “*Fun, fun, fun/ Fahren, fahren, fahren*” joke gained another layer: synthesised voices harmonising a cappella in the manner of the Beach Boys, from bass to falsetto, before combining in a single “*Wir fahren auf der Autobahn*” before the synths return.

“Radioactivity” was even stronger. This time the house beat gave it an urgency befitting the subject matter, and the lyrics were updated, with references to Chernobyl, Harrisburg (the site of Three Mile Island), Sellafield and Hiroshima, and the word “stop” inserted before the title word was sung. But there was still a grace to it: the section around 2:20, where a high synth picks out a Morse codeish pattern, while underneath a series of long, melancholy transitions are played, is the kind of thing that Pet Shop Boys, then in their pomp, would have given their eye teeth to get on to *Behaviour*.

AND, finally “Trans-Europe Express”, again dramatically shortened – from six-and-a-half minutes for the track itself to a little over three (“Abzug” was also halved, though “Metal On Metal” was extended to nearly five minutes, so the whole suite only lost a couple of minutes) – but reduced to its very essence of forward motion: most of the excision was the revolving pistons of the percussion, and in removing the lyric about meeting Iggy Pop and David Bowie, perhaps Kraftwerk were not taking away something that would have dated it but making their own boast about how

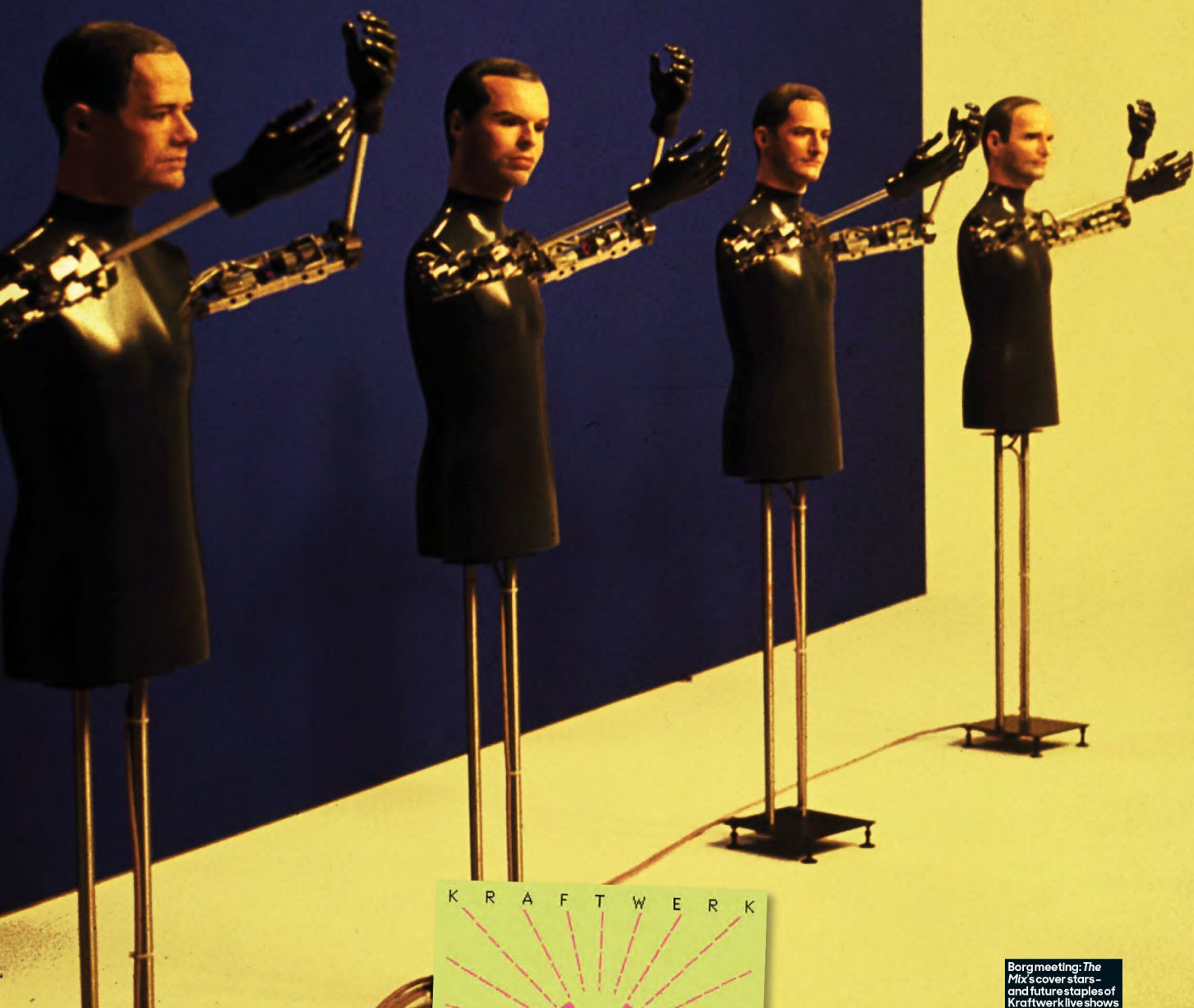
"TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS" WAS REDUCED TO ITS VERY ESSENCE OF FORWARD MOTION

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"Best here are the reworkings of 'Autobahn', which now suffles elegantly along to a latterday Soulll Soul-type backbeat, with Formula One vehicles now racing through its mid-section in place of the stately Volvos of yore. Also, the largely forgotten 'Radioactivity' is splendidly reactivated here, with a gothic, New Beat cathedral built around it in its honour."
DAVID STUBBS, MELODY MAKER, JUNE 15, 1991

"One of the most radically altered tracks is 'Radioactivity'. 16 years on taking on a new shape at twice its original pace, sounding more melodic and enhanced by the addition of extra sequences. But the outstanding cut is 'Trans-Europe Express'. Again brought up to date through the use of newer sounds, it's the closest you'll get to Kraftwerk trancing into the clubs."
SHERMAN, NME, JUNE 15, 1991





Borgmeeting: *The Mix*'s cover stars – and future staples of Kraftwerk live shows

their stature had risen in the intervening years: they were now equals, at least, of that pair.

Whatever the handwringing about it, *The Mix* ended up being the defining album of Kraftwerk's career. It's easy to forget their golden run of recordings occupied a mere seven years, and by 1991 they could no longer have relied on them to justify their continuing existence. *The Mix* gave them that reason to continue.

You may take the view that Kraftwerk as a legacy act is a betrayal of their original promise, in which case *The Mix* is exhibit one in the case for the prosecution, but without this album the Kraftwerk that countless thousands of people have been able to see live over the past 30 or so years would not exist. *The Mix* – and the digitising and reworking of their catalogue – has been the basis of their live performance ever since, dominating Kraftwerk's existence and well deserving its place as one of the albums



they played at their site-specific Catalogue shows early in the last decade. It put Kraftwerk in the eternal present, not just the present of 1974 or 1975 or 1977. It acknowledged the debt they were owed, and demanded payment of that debt. For better or worse, *The Mix* is the sound of Kraftwerk for the end of the last century and the start of this. ☢

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...THE MIX. THE MIX. THE MIX. THE MIX. THE MIX...

1. The Robots *****
2. Computer Love ***
3. Pocket Calculator *****
4. Dentaku ****
5. Autobahn *****
6. Radioactivity *****
7. Trans-Europe Express *****
8. Abzug *****

9. Metal On Metal *****
10. Home Computer ***
12. Music Non Stop ***

LABEL: EMI
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang, Düsseldorf
PRODUCED BY: Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider

PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter (album concept, music data mix, voice, vocoder, synclavier), Florian Schneider (album concept, music data mix, vocoder, speech synthesis), Fritz Hilpert (music data mix, electronic percussion)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 15; US –



"We find posing very boring... The robots are much better at it": Kraftwerk's mannequin-machines, remodelled for the '90s

"MUSIC IS ALREADY A VIRTUAL REALITY"

Excited by Detroit techno, and the "hooligan" energy of British clubs, Kraftwerk ready *The Mix*, which revisits and reworks their catalogue in advance of a new tour. Live, they feel the mood of the room and change their programs, **RALF HÜTTER** tells **SIMON WITTER**, "depending on the vibes of the situation".

NEW MUSICALEXPRESS JUNE 8, 1991



IN THE heart of London's Rage club, in the early hours of Friday, the world's top techno-Teuton sways discreetly from foot to foot, his face sporting a smile of justifiably enormous contentment.

Ralf Hütter – who, along with Florian Schneider, is Kraftwerk – hears the music he has spent over 20 years

polishing reflected in the pounding metallic inferno that soundtracks a night at Rage, and it pleases him no end.

"You know!" he shouts, leaning towards my ear and gesturing around at the flickering TV monitors and oblivious trance dancers, "if people had been making a film about hell 20 years ago, they would have conjured up something like this."

He's probably right, and he should know. "We were doing things like this early on," he continues, "and one reviewer wrote that Kraftwerk is the death of music."

While of course it didn't take very long for early listeners to get hip to Kraftwerk, nobody back then could have predicted the enormity of their influence on the future of pop music. Launched in the flared, spangled,

hairy days of glam rock, this clean-cut combo of besuited squares were to become the most influential white group in the history of dance music and precipitate a radical revision of the pop star's status.

All those chick-scoring, room-trashing '70s axe heroes who laughed at Kraftwerk's vision of musicians as

'robotnik' – ego-free workers in the sound factory – should see the charts in the '90s, full as they are of anonymous musicians whose clothes and opinions matter far less to the public than the beats and textures that hammer out of their electronic equipment. The cult of personality may survive in certain corners, but it's no thanks to Kraftwerk, who haven't even let anyone take their picture for 10 years now.

"We like to be as self-sufficient about our visuals as our music," says Ralf by way of explanation. "And anyway, we find posing very boring. The robots are so much better at it, they have more patience."

For a lynchpin in pop's most ruthlessly modern group, Ralf Hütter cuts an unexpectedly soft and, amidst the hardcore

hypnosis of Rage, bizarre figure. A trim, healthy-looking fortysomething, he is wearing a suit patterned with thin, evenly spaced black and grey lines. The ruffles of a dark

"ONE REVIEWER
WROTE THAT
KRAFTWERK
IS THE DEATH
OF MUSIC"
RALF HÜTTER



Kraftwerk at the Brixton Academy, London, July 19, 1991: (l-r) Ralf Hütter, Fernando Abantes, Fritz Hilpert, Florian Schneider

silk cravat separate his black Nehru shirt from his neck, and neatly combed, grey-streaked hair caps a face that seems eternally bent on smiling. He exudes a kindly sort of Bertie Wooster charm that is more Pimm's than techno.

But that's not to say that he doesn't have a penchant for the hardcore.

Another club we visit later that night is too Balearic for his taste. "I feel like I'm in Italy or Germany," he moans, "with all these people waving their hands in the air. It's so smooth, so soft. I remember the energy level in London being much more hooligan."

Ralf is in London, breaking the group's increasingly solid press silence, to proclaim Kraftwerk's return to the public eye. In July they'll be roaming Britain as part of their first world tour in 10 years, preceded on June 10 by *The Mix*, a double album of radically re-recorded Kraftwerk classics spanning the last 15 years.

As a fabulous update of Kraftwerk's back catalogue, *The Mix* makes a great excuse to talk about the past, but isn't a compilation an oddly

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You've skipped atmospheric classics like "Hall Of Mirrors" and "Neon Lights" in favour of the dance grooves, but people will be surprised by the absence of "The Model", the single that made you the first German band to top the British charts.

"We just worked on the ones that mixed. Maybe in a couple of years we'll do another album like this, and 'The Model' will appear on it in a totally different shape. We picked the tracks that jumped out at us first. There was no logic involved, except of course that they come from the timespan from *Autobahn* to the present. We didn't put anything on from the first three albums, because since *Autobahn* we haven't played that stuff live."

retrogressive gesture for such a forward-looking act?

"We had been working on the tracks for live performance," Ralf begins, "generating digital sounds and sampling from our old multi-track tapes, when we decided to put them all on a record. So they're not remixes, they're completely new recordings."

What can we expect from Kraftwerk live?

"We'll be bringing our Kling Klang studio plus visuals. We have films and computer graphics and we bring the robots with moving parts. They appear during the song 'The Robots' and make a mechanical ballet in perfect synchronisation, because they're all linked to the same computer generator. It's all audiovisuals based around the songs, but there's more development from that last tour in 1981."

Does your show vary from night to night?

"Yes. We can always play with the computers, get into the programs and change them, depending on the vibes of the situation. Nowadays the musical equipment is coming closer to what we always had in mind when we started out. There were always technical limitations before. Also we've replaced our percussionists Karl Bartos and Wolfgang Flür with an electronics engineer who always works with us in the studio and an additional musician. So now there is more sound, more electronics, programming and sound engineering going on."

Electric Cafe, your last album, didn't make much of an impact, maybe because it lacked the clearly defined identity of your previous LPs. How well do you expect *The Mix* to do?

"Basically we never know. We didn't even know with *Autobahn*. We played it to our friends, and



a few of them said, 'Fahren auf der Autobahn?! You've gone crazy!' We just put records out and see what happens, otherwise we'd end up overcalculating this or that."

JUST as "Trans-Europe Express" was their finest single and *The Man-Machine* their finest album, *The Mix* is the best point of entry for Kraftwerk beginners. But whereas once, next to what everyone else was doing, their style and activities used to seem very radical, their ideology has now been adopted by the mainstream. Their methods are commonplace. Is that something they're comfortable with?

"How can we now change? We've put 20 years into this kind of thing. We can't say tomorrow let's go back to acoustic guitar and marching bands."

I'm not saying you should grow afros and use wah-wah pedals to be different, but are you enjoying the way everyone sees your point now? Sometimes it's nice being different and controversial.

"To us it is very encouraging to see the popularity of this music we've put so much into. When we predicted that our little electronic instruments were going to be happening, nobody believed us."

WHAT Kraftwerk are all about has only ever been fully understood in the context of German culture, but even stripped of meaning and symbolism their music boasts a purity of sound that has never been equalled. Theirs is a gleaming turbine of sound, uncluttered with sentimental baggage or pompous flourishes, its brazen technology never hidden behind cautious, comforting metaphorical wooden panels.

One of the secrets of Kraftwerk's sound was that they used to infiltrate major computer companies and stimulate the boffins with the creative challenge of devising and customising equipment for Kraftwerk – which of course nobody else could get their hands on.

"That's true. We would feed ideas in both directions. Sometimes Florian would be given a speech computer that sounded very human, and we'd modify it to sound robotic, more technoid. The trick was to be able to inspire somebody with artistic ideas, and persuade them to work on the weekend, create that interest in making something that would be different from office work. But nowadays the music world has adapted more of this, studio equipment is so sophisticated that we need fewer bits of home-made equipment."

Their unique rhythms and textures, which fused with timeless melodies as the faultless execution of a thoroughly radical ideology, have resurfaced dismembered and out of context as a recurrent theme in every regional black American dance scene of the last decade. Bearing in mind their aura of straightness – stiff, even for a white band – that must amaze or amuse Ralf.

"It's hard to say, it has been going so long since *Trans-Europe Express*. I remember we went to a loft club in New York back in those days, and the DJ had pressed his own record, using our tapes of 'Metal On Metal', but extending it on and on and on. It was the beginning of DJ record making, and we were fascinated. It was just in our direction, because that's what we would do in our studio, establish a groove and play it for hours and hours. Maybe go out and come back hours later, and the machines would still be playing. So we were both surprised and pleased."

Where do you get your rhythms? Do you hear them in clubs?

"HOW CAN WE
CHANGE? WE'VE
PUT 20 YEARS
INTO THIS KIND
OF THING"
RALF HÜTTER

"No. It comes about out of speech or the machinery, or talking fingers. You never know. We have no working principle. If you took rhythms that were already popular in clubs, then all records would sound exactly the same, which is what's happening today. It's all like one record."

Are you aware of records that are influenced by you?

"In the clubs, yes, because I go out dancing. I go to clubs in Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Paris or wherever we go travelling. We go through phases; it's not too strict. It's not possible to go out five nights a week in Germany, because you have to work, but I go out dancing about once a week to keep in shape of the legs."

Do you know who the records are by?

"Not very often. I recognise the sounds, but usually the records are undefined. Obviously I know things like 'Trouble Funk Express', 'Planet Rock' and the Detroit techno scene."

What music do you listen to?

"We don't really listen to much these days; we try to reduce outside stimuli, to avoid overexposure. The average German listens to five hours of radio a day, whereas we listen to none. We buy the occasional record, from any part of the musical spectrum, but I haven't bought any records that I keep listening to after the curiosity has worn off. I like to wander around and hear music environmentally, coming out of the loudspeaker at a cafe or a club. I don't listen to music at home – I make music in the studio."

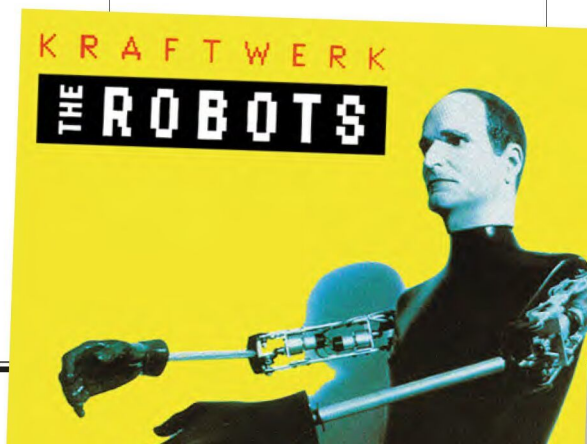
What do you do when you're not making music at Kling Klang?

"We make music all the time, then we sleep. It's a full-time job."

I heard you and Florian have a private museum, in which you've collected the bikes on which the Tour De France has been won since the turn of the century. That's why you broke studio silence in '83 to release the single "Tour De France".

"No, we just have a few bikes each, which we use. It's not a museum. We cycle all the time. Florian has two racers and a city bike, and I have three racers: one for flat time trials – super fast, one for flat long distance and one for mountains. We cycle in our area and in Holland and Belgium, which are nearby. Sometimes we go off, together or alone, to cycle in France or in the Dolomites in Italy. We've tried some of the mountain passes on the Tour De France. It's true that we have a passion for cycling, but the story about the museum is an exaggeration."

Are you what the Germans call a *lebenskünstler* – an artist of life – someone who spends a lot of effort doing everything right, getting their shoes made by the right Hungarian cobbler, etc?



"Yes, *Lebenskünstler* is a very nice word. I would also use the word *gesamtkunstwerk* – total work of art – to describe Kraftwerk. That means we're not just musicians, we're rounded artists."

Do you have all your clothes especially made for you?

"No. We pay attention to every detail, but we also go shopping, picking and choosing. As for lifestyle, we have a regular barber and we're both vegetarians."

KRAFTWERK came into being when Ralf Hütter met Florian Schneider on an improvised music course at Düsseldorf Conservatory in 1968. In 1974, after three albums of loosely structured, instrumental electronic music, they hit paydirt with "Autobahn", a majestic 22-minute celebration of motorway cruising that featured, for the first time, lyrics.

If their early music had been tone poems inspired by the environmental sounds of Düsseldorf's industry, *Autobahn* fused vocodered car buzzes and a classical melody with the mechanical rhythm of synthetic traffic noises to create a new industrial folk music.

"Autobahn" was a disco hit in America, and they became the objects of major patronage from David Bowie, who later incorporated elements of their look and lighting into his act.

"That was very important for us, because it linked what we were doing with the rock mainstream. Bowie used to tell everyone that we were his favourite group, and in the mid-'70s the rock press used to hang on every word from his mouth like tablets of stone. We met him when he played Düsseldorf on one of his first European tours. He was travelling by Mercedes, listening to nothing but *Autobahn* all the time."

If their appearance and the fact that they sang in German (when 75 per cent of German radio was in English) seemed odd, their subject matter was even more jarringly out-of-time in '70s Germany. When the Green Party was busting out, they were celebrating the network of motorways with which Hitler had defiled the countryside, and when every thinking German was paranoid about ID cards and the central police computer at Plenzdorf, they were celebrating and embracing the computer world. These were radical gestures within Germany, meaningless outside.

"It does have meaning outside," Ralf protests, "because I've spoken to people from Italy or France who have a fairly identical understanding. So maybe you're talking about something from England, which is different and goes beyond my intimate knowledge of the situation here."

The English translations of your lyrics certainly don't work. Not only do the German versions

sound more poetic, they carry different cultural resonances. The pressure to rhyme forces completely different nuances of meaning, so a song like "The Model", which would be understood as ironic in German, ends up sounding like the simplistic doodlings of a five-year-old in English.

"That's hard for me to judge, but we get a lot of response everywhere, so I think our point is getting across."

Kraftwerk never worshipped technology for its own sake – they embraced and used it.

The music of "Autobahn" suggests a harmony between the motorway network and the landscape it traverses, and the subsequent albums, *Radio-Activity*, *Trans-Europe Express*, *The Man-Machine* and *Computer World* all called for a new, productive attitude to technology. Instead of fearing police computers, Kraftwerk made the tools of state oppression sing. They also

talked a lot about the symbiosis of man and machine, having a piece of equipment that would translate thoughts into real sounds. Are they any closer to developing it?

"We're closer today in the sense that we can create more of the sounds we imagine, but we haven't yet got a machine that plays by telepathy. People are working on that in the visual field at the moment."

You mean virtual reality?

"Yes, but to me music is already a virtual reality. *Autobahn* is just music, it's only sounds, chords and waveforms, but if we play it right, you should be able to smell the petrol and the tyres."

But the symbiosis machine, can that ever become a reality?

"We're working on it with Kling Klang studio on our end. We're getting closer, so that whenever we think of any musical things, we can go and do them. The thing would be to create that simultaneously, and that's still not the case, there's still a delay time. But when you really get into it... I have experienced situations where I can instantly play the music as I hear it, simultaneously even, where I go along as it's happening. It has to do with talking fingers. I can talk with my fingers like talking drums."

You've often said that you were reacting against classical music in Germany, the idea of a body of music that people play over and over again without ever going forwards.

Why then did you have a song on *Trans-Europe Express* called "Franz Schubert"?

"We had the sequencers playing, and I was experimenting with things, then suddenly Franz Schubert stepped into the picture. It sounded like Franz Schubert. Certain compositions were really composed upfront, conceptually, and then others came to us like gifts from the musical machines. That was the case with 'Franz Schubert', which was only a small piece, but even things like 'Trans-Europe Express' came like a train going through the studio. This is the type of music I like best, music which speaks for itself, which comes to us."

People used to say there were only three groups that understood electronic music – you, Yellow Magic Orchestra and Yello. Did you ever feel a kindred spirit with those groups?

"There was certainly that feeling. We met Yellow Magic Orchestra when we were playing shows in Tokyo, but I'm not so familiar with their music, it never really got to me. It seemed more jokey, jazz-rocky. The new Detroit-type of thing seems much more close to our approach, hypnotic, rolling."

Like the rhythm track composed of breathing noises on "Tour De France", Kraftwerk's use of environmental sounds is always appropriate. They don't go in for wacky samples – peeling sellotape off a table, caning a balloon, etc – but they did

"I REMAIN
PASSIONATE
ABOUT TAKING
WHAT WE DO TO
THE NEXT PHASE"
RALF HÜTTER

Hütter and co at the Muziekcentrum Vredenburg in Utrecht, Netherlands, November 13, 1991





More electronics, more sound engineering: Florian Schneider on stage at Die Halle, Berlin, November 25, 1994



once talk of recording the sound of the stars, the energy given off by large pulsars. Did that ever come to anything?

"No, but I know tapes of this exist. We don't have them. I don't want to say too much and give you the wrong facts, but I know that three or four years ago someone translated the waves into frequencies and then had a computer play them. There's even a composer working on the scales and harmonies, translating the waves onto electronic equipment, and it sounds quite nice. It's not a constant tone, it changes all the time."

The Germans invented the tape recorder, which was the biggest leap forward in sound technology since the piano. Are they still ahead?

"No. These days it's the Japanese or Americans. Germany is completely out of the picture. The only thing that's left is some old microphones. All the inventing took place before the war, and the creative scientific impulse never recovered after the war, when people were occupied with rebuilding their houses and getting Mercedes and Volkswagen. Germany is very efficient in certain areas, but not that one."

After the war there was a cultural vacuum in Germany for about 20 years, when young people, ashamed of the heritage of the war, rejected their culture and looked to England and America. Your emergence alongside the likes of Faust, Can, Neu!, Tangerine Dream and Giorgio Moroder signalled a revitalising of German popular culture, which continued through the *Neue Deutsche Welle* of the early '80s. What's the scene like now?

"It's very quiet. We seem to be going through another dead period in filmmaking too, and I have absolutely no idea why. There's no obvious reason for it. With the wall down, there should really be a burst of activity."

It feels like the pause button has been depressed on German culture.

"That's correct. I hadn't really thought about it, but it is like a resting period, like our culture is on hold."

Would you say your music is still ethnically German, that it couldn't come from anywhere else?

"It has become more of an international language, but I still think it's very German. Maybe that sounds a bit nationalistic; let's say European in feel, definitely. If you put an American band in our studio and asked them to make a record about the Tour De France, the output would be different."

If Kraftwerk's futuristic ideas about man/machine symbiosis are being developed anywhere, it is surely in California's virtual-reality community. Yet, despite having computer-generated an entire video at the New York Institute Of Technology five years ago, Ralf is strangely uninformed about this culture. Surely the idea of people all over the world simultaneously interfacing in an artificially created electronic reality is exactly what Kraftwerk were predicting, men exploiting and getting inside the ultimate interactive technology?

"Yes, but that's what we're doing with our musical computers, already. The visual side does interest me, but we've only just finished the musical side. So far I feel bored by virtual reality, because the ideas are so far ahead of what they can actually do – but maybe that's just a first impression."

As a group, you've always looked to the future rather than the past. Does the idea of the future still excite you?

"Yes. No more or less than before, it's a constant thing. We're always thinking about what we're working

on, and the shows we're preparing for, so we don't have time to think about the past. The future in terms of unrealised possibilities is something that comes out of this process."

I was thinking of the future in wider, more general terms.

"You mean society-wise? Of course it's something I think about, and my feelings are very ambivalent. I'm concerned about what the Germans call the *fernsteuerung* of society, remote control, mass dictatorship. I don't mean the classical system of one man controlling all, a father figure, because I don't think that exists any more. I think there's some form of mass thing, like avalanches, that have their own dynamics and that few people understand."

"Things like elections make no sense. The fact that 99 per cent of people vote for something makes no statement about the quality of what they're voting for, and this kind of demographic dictatorship... It's still too early in my mind, but I should be writing some music in this direction. There's a cult of mass appeal, which I don't share. Like having 40 radio stations which all play the same Top 40. Nobody's talking about control of what's coming out of the television. These are things I think about, ratings and demographic dictatorship, why somebody should be president just because so many people voted for this posing dummy?"

Isn't the size of the vote a comment on the quality of the candidate?

"Yes, but these things are manipulated too."

Do you think 'democracy' is a bad thing?

"I have a different understanding of what democracy is, more anarchic. I can't quite follow that supermarket democracy. But I'm far from having any solutions to society's ills."

Are there any long-term plans for Kraftwerk, any unexpected collaborations?

"I don't know. We'll just see what happens when we play in Detroit. We're in a very open situation at the moment and I like that a lot. It's very curious. We've been talking here about 20 years of our past, and I'd forgotten about certain things, which maybe I should rethink, but I remain passionate about taking what we do to the next phase. I've never lost the slightest bit of interest." 🐣



12 TOUR DE FRANCE SOUNDTRACKS

BACK IN THE SADDLE AFTER A SPILL, RALF AND FLORIAN'S OBSESSION FINALLY RESULTS IN THEIR YELLOW JERSEY RECORD: A HARMONIC CYCLE INDEED. BY JOHN LEWIS

RELEASED: AUGUST 4, 2003

THE rather derogatory term MAMIL – an acronym for a “middle-aged man in Lycra” – had not been coined in the late 1970s when Kraftwerk started getting into cycling. Lycra was still known as Spandex at the time, and wealthy men undergoing a midlife crisis were supposed to blow their money on sports cars, not bicycles.

Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, however, were rather ahead of the curve. Together with other thirtysomething Düsseldorf friends – including architect Volker Albus, orthopaedic professor Willy Klein and hairdresser Teja Schmitz – they invested in ludicrously high-spec road bikes, donned the tight-fitting clothing worn by Tour and Vuelta cyclists, and explored the so-called “Bergisches Land” of Solingen and Remscheid – the hilly Rhineland countryside around Düsseldorf.

“They would easily do 50 or 100 kilometres a day,” said Ralf Dörper, a Düsseldorf friend of the band who was in the industrial metal band Die Krupps. “I cycled a lot at the time, but rarely more than 20 or 30k a day while I was working. But Ralf and Florian were in a different league. They’d go to these really specialist shops outside of Düsseldorf that sold equipment for professionals.” When touring with Kraftwerk in the early 1980s, Hütter would even demand that the road crew drop him and his bike off around 100 miles from the next venue, where he would join them.

The rather more degenerate Karl Bartos was always unwilling to embrace the Kraftwerkian

notion of man and machine becoming one on a top-of-the-range racing bike. “I’d have dinner with Ralf or Florian most days, and all they wanted to talk about was how they had just ridden 200km,” he says. “I found this very boring.” Even Wolfgang Flür, who initially shared Ralf and Florian’s hobby, lost interest, complaining that the Kling Klang studio was becoming full of bicycle chains, inner tubes and sweat-stinking cycling clothes. “It became more and more a workshop for preparing and repairing bicycles,” he says. “And they became addicted, in the way that an athlete becomes addicted to the endorphin highs of exercise.”

In the years that followed 1981’s *Computer World*, the band worked on an aborted album entitled ‘Techno Pop’, one that was loosely themed around this cycling obsession. Those fitful sessions were brought to a close in May 1982, when Hütter was seriously injured in a cycling accident – apparently riding without a helmet, it seems he landed on his head – and spent several days in hospital. But the band did manage to record one song named after and celebrating cycling’s most celebrated annual tournament, the Tour De France. The single, a No 22 UK hit in August 1983, was an early use of sampling in pop music. The rhythmic, aerobic panting mirrors the vocal

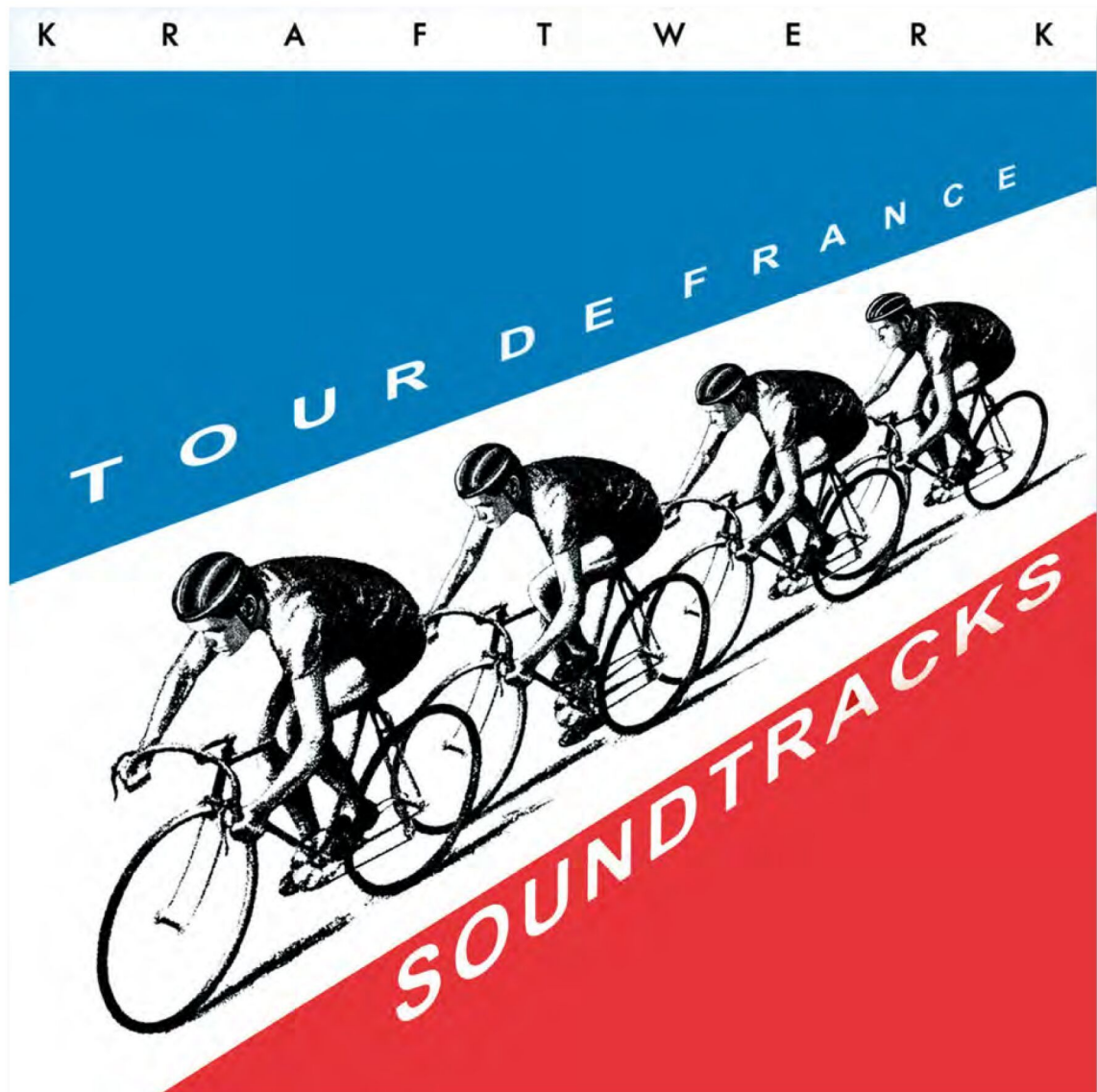
exertions of a cyclist ascending a mountain on a Tour stage, and is repeated at a speed of around 130bpm, while the skeletal drum loop resembles the clicking of a freewheel and the clanking of a bike chain. Over this machine-like pulse, the band take a 10-note fragment of melody from “Heiter Bewegt” – a section from Paul Hindemith’s 1936 “Sonata For Flute And Piano” – which they then transpose into several different keys as the song enters a complex harmonic

cycle. The lyrics, co-written with band associate Maxime Schmitt and chanted by Hütter and Schneider in French, serve as a whistle-stop commentary of the race, listing the various stages (“the hell of northern Paris-Roubaix, the Côte d’Azur and Saint-Tropez”) and some of the Tour’s iconic mountain climbs (the Col du Galibier in the Alps and the Col du Tourmalet in the Pyrenees). By the final verse it has transformed into a Soviet-style tribute to the dignity of sport (“flat tyre on the paving stones/the bicycle is repaired quickly/the peloton is regrouped/

camaraderie and friendship”).

The song was featured in the 1984 hip-hop film *Breakdance*, where the character Turbo, played by Michael “Boogaloo Shrimp” Chambers, accompanies François Kevorkian’s instrumental mix of the song with a remarkable robotic dance, performed as he sweeps the

“TOUR DE FRANCE” WAS AN EARLY USE OF SAMPLING AND CEMENTED THE BAND’S LINKS WITH HIP-HOP



floor of a grocery store. It cemented the band's links with African-American hip-hop and electro, although they refused to allow the song to be used on the film's celebrated soundtrack – instead there was a cover version by a session band called 10 Speed, which replicates some of the synthetic drums and sampled breaths, but adds slap bass and piano.

So, 20 years later, the remaining members of Kraftwerk, Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider – along with Fritz Hilpert (a member since 1999's "Expo 2000") and longtime Kling Klang sound engineer Henning Schmitz – chose to revive this standalone single, using it as the central text in an album themed around the 100th anniversary of the Tour De France. Of course, this being Kraftwerk, their endless, studioholic perfectionism meant that the finished album wasn't actually ready for the Tour (which took place throughout July 2003), and was instead released a week after the race concluded.

The album kicks off with a four-track song suite – "Tour De France Etape 1-3" along with "Chrono" – which lasts around 21 minutes, all very loosely based on the original single and clocking in at a hi-NRG 140bpm throughout. You can hear vestiges of the original song's arpeggiated riff and the machine-like rhythms, but the mood is ravier, with a spray-can hi-hat, a deep bass pop and a glacial organ sound. The lyrics certainly mirror the original song's narration of the race ("Television transmission/Report on motorbike/The teams presented/The start is given/The stages are burned..."). However, here the reportage is narrated by a new character who will dominate the entire album – a growling robot who has been pitch-shifted down a couple of octaves until he sounds like an android Barry White. He's barely been heard in Kraftwerkworld before (you might be able to detect a similar voice making a brief appearance about three-and-a-half minutes into "Techno Pop" on the previous album) but here he's the unifying figure, the narrator of the entire album, adding to the concept of the project.

Where *Electric Café* had a slightly disjointed, larky air – constantly changing style and vocal register – *Tour De France Soundtracks* is a true concept album, even more so than *Computer World*. Each track follows on logically from the last, like the riders in a peloton; each shares a machine-like feel that never strays from Kraftwerk's comfort zone. There are no daft songs about being a sex object; there is no Yello-like Dadaist vocal poetry like "Boing Boom Tschak"; no slap bass; no American-accented samples of answerphone messages. There is no self-parody, no time for cheap laughs. *Tour De France Soundtracks* is Kraftwerk at their most Kraftwerkian; a disciplined, precision-crafted album that's as cleverly engineered as the €10,000 "Ultimate CF SLX Kraftwerk" bicycle that Canyon built in the group's honour for the 2017 Tour De France.

Cycling technology, of course, had come on

leaps and bounds in the two decades that followed the 1983 "Tour De France" single. Many of the top-of-the-range cycling accoutrements that would have been beyond the fantasy even of elite riders like Hütter and Schneider in the early 1980s – carbon and titanium frames, Shimano derailleurs, Tiagra group sets, STI shifters, clipless pedals – were, by the early 2000s, either standard features on entry-level bikes, or were at least within range of the enthusiastic amateur.

And there is a very obvious parallel with the

musical tech that Kraftwerk were using. The studio equipment that set them apart in 1983 – drum machines, samplers, vocoders and wavetable synthesis – were, by 2003, widely available to everyone; a teenager of 2003 could access such plug-ins on his or her laptop, without the need to visit a state-of-the-art recording studio in Düsseldorf. Whole universes of electronic music have come and gone in that intervening 20-year period,

many of them inspired by Kraftwerk. It means that, while *Tour De France Soundtracks* sounds grandly, beautifully Kraftwerkian throughout, you are constantly aware that they also helped to create the electronic world that had, by 2003, become ubiquitous.

At points, Kraftwerk are able to casually mimic some of the myriad forms of electronic music that had emerged in their absence simply by being themselves. "Aero Dynamik" is a terrific, twitchy piece of acid house, based around a percussive, two-note bassline, and a drum beat that sounds like it's being played on springs. The almost comically baritone robot vocal intones lyrics that are quintessentially Kraftwerkian ("Perfection mécanique, aéro dynamik, matériel et teknik... condition et physique... position et taktik"), but the best bit comes in a minute from the end when the voice drops out and the percussive synths are endlessly pitch-shifted to sound like they're floating upwards, giving the impression that the groove has become loosened from its moorings and is creeping up the north face of the Galibier.

Another twitchy two-note acid house bassline introduces "Titanium", named after the lightweight metal that has become increasingly popular with top-of-the-range road bikes, and featuring a suitably metallic drum pattern and some fittingly stiff sawtooth synth riffs. "Carbon, aluminium, titanium bike frame", growls the robot, in French, as a tinny, interlocking rhythmic grid enters rave territory. "Elektro Kardiogramm" revives the sampled breathing noises, the heartbeat pulse and machine-like clanks of the original "Tour De France" groove, and there are

A GROWLING
ROBOT IS PITCH-
SHIFTED DOWN
UNTIL HE SOUNDS
LIKE AN ANDROID
BARRY WHITE

THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"The good news is, despite opening with a watery suite of house remixes of the Düsseldorf quartet's 1983 single 'Tour De France', most of ... *Soundtracks* sounds as fresh and timeless as a beautiful sunset. With squelched Mysterons vocals and liquid beatscapes, 'Aero Dynamik' and 'Elektro Kardiogramm' are both mesmerising and hilariously deadpan. And clanging cubist cyber-funk tracks like 'Vitamin' are not puns on the past but the glistening, elegant, confident sound of Kraftwerk 2003. Please don't leave it another 10 years." STEPHEN DALTON, NME, AUGUST 2, 2003

moments when you think that the song's hilariously deadpan minimalism will end up sounding like a (particularly astute) Flight Of The Conchords piss-take of Kraftwerk. However, just as you think they're entering self-parody,

it suddenly takes a dark turn, with a series of discordant organ drones that resemble the improvisatory section of "Autobahn".

Another highlight is "Vitamin", a wonderfully squeaky piece of techno that twangs and buzzes in all the right places, as a voice (for the only time on the album, not the baritone-voiced android Barry White, but a standard-issue robot voice) lists a series of vitamins and supplements: "Kalium, Kalzium, Eisen, Magnesium, Carbo-Hydrat Protein, A-B-C-D Vitamin". In retrospect, we now know that the Tour, the Vuelta d'Espana and the Giro d'Italia around this time were all being dominated by teams that practised organised doping programmes, and the offhand references to "adrenalin, endorphin" become





ROBOTER



ROBOTER



ROBOTER

rather more sinister – the percussion starts to buzz and vibrate, much as Lance Armstrong's head must have felt after his daily cocktail of EPO (erythropoietin).

"La Forme" is a solo Ralf Hütter composition that starts as a gentle, glacial, drumless piece recalling Orbital, based around a wiggly octave phrase played on a synth organ. It slowly builds in intensity to become a stately piece of ambient house, with the narrator listing a hypnotic litany of cycling buzzwords ("*preparation, musculation, concentration, condition*").

It segues into a coda, "Régénération", a short hymnal meditation that links the future to the past – leading into a mix of the 1983 single. This time round the rhythmic grid is overlaid with a slightly twangy techno judder, but even without this updating, you are aware that this is a piece of music that has barely dated, a gleaming piece of future funk that slots even more comfortably into 2003 than it did into the world of 1983.

Tour De France Soundtracks is a slick, well-oiled (man) machine of a record that brings the band

up to date, neatly uniting Kraftwerk with the electronic world that they created. It serves as a fitting but slightly confusing swansong. For a band that always seemed to embrace the future, Kraftwerk have spent much of the last two decades looking into the past, endlessly tweaking their legacy (even more so since Florian Schneider's departure in November 2008, leaving Hütter as the only original member).

Their live sets have remained largely static for decades – even the actual musical choices they played in the tours that followed *Tour De France Soundtracks* weren't radically different from those they were playing in 1981. But, while Hütter's touring Kraftwerk are all about recreating the back catalogue, *Tour De France Soundtracks* sees the band exploring their past to create a possible future. 🌱

...SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTES. SLEEVENOTE ...TOUR DE FRANCE SOUNDTRACKS. TOUR DE FRANCE.....

1. Prologue **
2. Tour De France Étape 1 ***
3. Tour De France Étape 2 ***
4. Tour De France Étape 3 ***
5. Chrono ***
6. Vitamin ****
7. Aéro Dynamik *****
8. Titanium ***
9. Elektro Karlogramm *****
10. La Forme ***

11. Régénération **
12. Tour De France *****
LABEL: Kling Klang/EMI/
Astralwerks
PRODUCED BY: Florian Schneider,
Ralf Hütter
RECORDED AT: Kling Klang,
Düsseldorf, between 1982
and 2003
PERSONNEL: Ralf Hütter

(vocals, software synthesisers,
sequencing), Florian Schneider
(vocals, software synthesisers,
sequencing), Fritz Hilpert
(software synthesisers,
electronic percussion), Henning
Schmitz (software synthesisers,
electronic percussion)
HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK 21; US -

"THE ELECTRONIC
ENERGY IS
EVERYWHERE"



Emerging from 18 years of studio isolation to find a brave new pop world built in his image, RALF HÜTTER considers Kraftwerk's place in culture's grand scheme, the missing link between Bauhaus and Bambaataa. En route, "psycho" drummers and robotic clubbing, destination the extremely long-awaited *Tour De France Soundtracks*.

"It was," Ralf tells STEPHEN DALTON, "a sleeper"



Regenerated: Ralf
Hütter, Henning
Schmitz, Fritz Hilpert
and Florian Schneider
at the 2004 Coachella
festival, May 2004

Simu-Lycra:
Kraftwerk go
dayglo for the
21st century

UNCUT APRIL, 2004



AT the moronic inferno that is MTV Europe's annual awards show in Edinburgh, Kraftwerk make a shockingly unexpected appearance. But here they are, dressed in matching black uniforms criss-crossed with fluorescent green stripes, impassively hunched over compact laptop terminals. The song is "Aerodynamik": a ripple of rhythm, a swoosh of melody, and a sibilant cyborg vocal about the streamlined beauty of bicycle design. Kraftwerk are sublime, ridiculous, and gloriously out of place. Still.

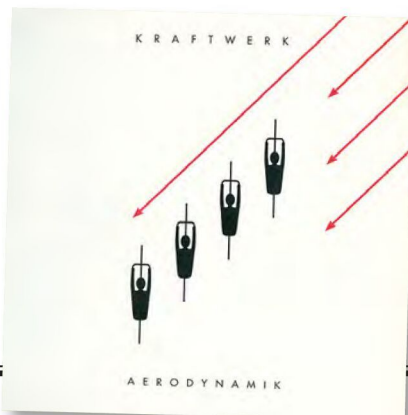
Placed between The White Stripes and The Darkness, Kraftwerk are living legends to half the crowd, baffling electro eggheads to the rest. With 35 years of musical innovation behind them, they are the oldest act on the MTV bill, but also the freshest, boldest and weirdest.

A little over three minutes of airtime, and they're gone. Three minutes of pristine invention following three decades of revolution. Without Kraftwerk, half the bands on MTV would not sound the way they do – including Kylie's pulsing new electro-minimalist direction. Without Germany's original techno trailblazers, disco, synth-pop, hip-hop and house might have sounded very different, too. Without the

Krautrock Beatles, the history of pop would have been dangerously low on electricity.

But Kraftwerk have never been rock stars. They revolutionised pop by rewiring the present and reimagining the future. They posed as showroom dummies and uniformed robots, faceless workers manufacturing "industrial folk music" in their Düsseldorf noise factory. But behind their coolly efficient image, they were high-maintenance, avant-garde conceptual artists with an agonisingly slow work rate and almost impossibly high standards. Cloaked in secrecy, they shunned superstar collaborations and fell silent for whole decades.

Three decades of stubborn brilliance, funk and futurism, anarchy and acrimony. Where can Kraftwerk go from here?



SIPPING cranberry juice in a swish Edinburgh hotel, where his fellow guests include Justin Timberlake and Beyoncé, Ralf Hütter speaks with the soft but slightly pained air of a music professor being forced to attend *Pop Idol* auditions. A well-preserved figure in his late fifties, he oozes a peculiarly Middle European elegance that speaks of leather-bound volumes and oak-panelled ballrooms.

Is he a Kylie fan? The public face of Kraftwerk frowns. "The one song I heard yesterday was interesting electronics. That's what I am into, electronic soundtracks."

But what about Minogue herself? Surely "Can't Get You Out Of My Head", with its synthetic groove and robot-dancing video, is pure Kraftwerk? "Yes," he beams, "but the electronic energy is everywhere."

Hütter rarely gives interviews. Even when he does, he confines himself to gnomish utterances. By sampling his own previous interviews, Ralf reveals as little as possible. But today, with a new Kraftwerk album and tour to discuss, the man behind *The Man-Machine* seems relaxed and open.

Even by the elastic definition of time on Planet Kraftwerk, the Düsseldorf quartet's latest album really tested the patience of their fans and record label. Arriving out of nowhere in October last year, *Tour De France Soundtracks* brought Kraftwerk into the 21st century with its liquid-



paralysis, prisoners of their own legendary perfectionism. As studio electronics became standard tools for everyone from Britney to the Neptunes, some believed Kraftwerk

would rather remain silent than risk their impeccable reputation as cutting-edge test pilots.

"No, we never thought about it," Hütter argues. "Because the music is not immanent in the technology. We play the machines and the machines play us. So it's still interaction."

The mammoth gaps between albums, he insists, have been filled with meticulous overhauls of the band's sound and studio. "We do not have a four-year plan," he quips. "They tried that in Eastern Germany but the Wall has come down." Ah, that legendary Kraftwerk Humour.

Hütter has always stressed the notion that Kraftwerk are "musical workers" with a strict nine-to-five schedule. It's a droll idea and fits with their deadpan conceptual image. But surely large chunks of that 18-year sabbatical must have been spent on cycling holidays, family, side-projects? "No, no, no," he insists. "We are musical workers and we have no other profession, no other dedication. This is all we do."

KRAFTWERK'S roots lie in the bombed-out ruins of post-war Europe. The retro-modern clean lines of their music is a direct comment on the utopian techno-state that Germany was once supposed to be, before the cultural devastation under the Nazis and literal devastation by the Allied raids that flattened its major cities – especially Düsseldorf, nerve centre of the nation's industrial heartland.

Journalists who look for fascistic undertones in the band's Teutonic ethos of robotic conformity, Hütter bristles, are missing the point.

"That comes from watching bad TV programmes. It's still there, when the German football team comes to France or something, they talk about Panzers. It's nonsense. It's all gimmicks. We were the first Bundesrepublik generation, so for us that's old. We're very lucky

because by then we were looking to the future."

Maybe, but it was the future by way of the past. Far from flirting with fascist chic, part of Kraftwerk's mission was to reconnect with the visionary craftsmanship of the Bauhaus and other pre-war German institutions destroyed by the culture-hating Nazis. They stepped into a vacuum, composing the soundtrack to a shattered nation.

"We lost a period of cultural creativity," nods Hütter. "That stopped at the end of the '20s in Germany, with people emigrating or being persecuted. So for us it was a zero situation – it's a shock in the first place, this nothing. But then we take a deep breath and say: OK, it's a chance. Like a white space where we can go in and maybe create something with minimal means. For us there was an enormous space."

Hütter first encountered Kraftwerk co-founder Schneider on an improvised music course at the Düsseldorf Conservatory in the late 1960s.

Inseparable ever since, Hütter likens their relationship to a marriage. Organisation, the duo's short-lived first group, was a jazz-rock collective featuring guitarist Michael Rother, drummers Andreas Hohman and Klaus Dinger, plus a handful of collaborators.

After Rother and Dinger left to form Krautrock legends Neu!, their former colleagues struck out as a duo under the name Kraftwerk – meaning "power station". But their impassive robot-worker image was still years away. In long hair and leathers, Hütter and Schneider

were MC5 and Stooges fans, mixing with the radical student crowd of the Vietnam protest era.

"We were always playing at student parties," says Hütter. "Parties is not the word – events, happenings. A party today is a different thing. Everything wasn't so organised as today, with stage barriers and things, so we played in some art centres in the corner and my friend brought from the autobahn a traffic cone to mark the area. A musical work in progress."

In 1970, Hütter and Schneider established their Kling Klang studio in a rented warehouse in Düsseldorf. It's still there today. Over three early albums, they bent the Kraftwerk sound increasingly towards electronic minimalism, customising their own primitive synths and drum machines.

"WE PLAY THE MACHINES. THE MACHINES PLAY US. IT'S STILL INTERACTION"
RALF HÜTTER

crystal melodies, biomechanical squelches and cardiovascular rhythms. It is the band's first full album of new material since 1986, although the initial concept dates back to their 1983 single of the same name, a weightless shimmer of aerated elegance.

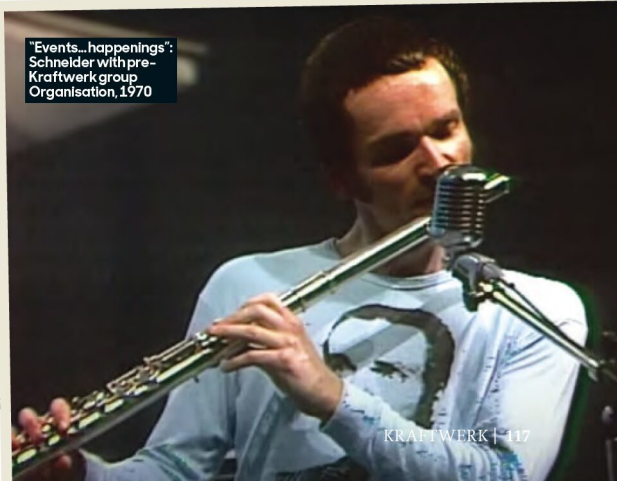
"It was meant to be an album," Hütter admits. "Then suddenly the Tour de France started, so we put out the single in '83, and afterwards we went into other ideas. So the album concept was put aside. It was a... sleeper. This album could have been done in '83, but then it would have been different."

Hütter's passion for cycling goes back to the late '70s. Together with fellow Kraftwerk founder Florian Schneider-Esleben and Fritz Hilpert, a studio engineer and junior band member for the past decade, he attends regular cycle club meetings all over Europe. Last year, to mark the race's centenary, they were invited to observe key stages of the Tour de France by helicopter and official race car.

"The director of the Tour de France is a big music fan," says Hütter. "In the old days the race would have accordion music, but this is the real Tour de France music with the noise of the bike riders, breath and heart monitors. It's really inside the tour as we, Kraftwerk, see it."

Tour De France Soundtracks came as a surprise to Kraftwerk fans convinced Hütter and Schneider had long ago succumbed to creative

"Events...happenings": Schneider with pre-Kraftwerk group Organisation, 1970





Hair Herren: Hütter, Schneider and Emil Schult in Kling Klang, Düsseldorf, February 1973

At the time, Germany was the paranoid, politically charged frontline of the Cold War. The Red Army Faction, aka the Baader-Meinhof Gang, were trying to foment armed revolution against the state with killings, kidnappings and bombs. Long-haired youths unloading vans full of strange technical equipment were naturally suspect, and Kraftwerk were questioned by the police more than once.

Hütter and Schneider were never political revolutionaries, but the radicalism of the era left its mark. Hütter claims Kraftwerk stand for “a pan-European community exchanging cultural electronic connections”.

So there is a political philosophy behind Kraftwerk?

“Definitely. This autonomous idea stayed with us until today. We belong to nobody. This is immanent in the music, the way we are organised, and our everyday life practices. It’s what we actually do.”

Kraftwerk are anarchists, then?

“Yes,” he smiles.

A very organised form of anarchy?

“Yes, just like music is organised noise.”

THE classic Kraftwerk lineup coalesced in 1974 with the arrival of percussionists Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos, who replaced Klaus Röder. Emil Schult, a frequent

collaborator on lyrics and artwork, also contributed to “Autobahn” – the single that made the band unlikely chart stars on both sides of the Atlantic.

Hütter and Schneider hit upon a unique musical approach that the

journalist Andy Gill later christened “romantic realism”, a blending of pop-art simplicity and musique concrète with a utopian celebration of the urban and mechanical environment.

“In ‘Autobahn’ we put car sounds, horns, basic melodies and tuning motors,” recalls Hütter.

“Adjusting the suspension and tyre pressure, rolling on the asphalt, that gliding sound – phhhwwtphhhwwt – when the wheels go onto those painted stripes. It’s sound poetry, and also very dynamic.”

Kraftwerk toured America for three months in early 1975. Some US journalists even dubbed them the German Beach Boys, taking the “*fahren, fahren, fahren*” refrain of “Autobahn” as an oblique homage to the “*fun, fun, fun*” of Southern California surf-pop.

Meanwhile, David Bowie, then on the verge of his own Germanic exile, became the band’s unofficial cheerleader. A rumoured collaboration never materialised, although Kraftwerk met Bowie when his 1976 *Station To Station* tour came to Düsseldorf, later dropping his name into their “Trans-Europe Express” single. Another mooted collaboration with Michael Jackson also came to nothing.

After 1974’s *Autobahn* album, Kraftwerk became reclusive, locked away in their Kling Klang bunker. But this was also their creative golden age, turning out beautifully crafted retro-futurist epics *Radio-Activity*, *Trans-Europe Express* and *The Man-Machine* in a three-year sprint from 1975 to 1978. Each album was a conceptual whole, a sonic advance.

According to the deranged memoirs of Wolfgang Flür, *Kraftwerk: I Was A Robot*, published a decade after he acrimoniously quit the band in the early ’90s, this was also a period of bohemian excess. Flür spills spicy tales of groupies, threesomes, propositions from both sexes and porn-fuelled orgies at Schneider’s parental home. Although he concedes that Hütter and Schneider usually left before the action began, Flür’s book still enraged his former Kraftwerk colleagues when it was published in 2000. They slapped a court injunction on him, and even removed his name from their reissued albums.

“He’s a psycho,” scowls Hütter, suddenly animated. “An egomaniac. I mean, we always engaged different drummers at different times for different projects. So it’s... weird.”

Given that Flür was in Kraftwerk for 16 of their most productive and innovative years, this verdict seems harsh. But, then again, the renegade robot broke Kraftwerk’s strict “omertà” policy. Although by all reports Hütter and Schneider live normal family lives with wives and children, they maintain a strict code of secrecy.

“Yes, we are always private,” confirms Hütter. “Music is very private. Because we really concentrate on our work. That is the Kraftwerk ethic.”

WITH 1981’s sublime *Computer World*, Kraftwerk left behind valve-radio nostalgia and embraced the emerging microchip revolution. While pioneering post-punk acts like Depeche Mode, The Human



JOE STEVENS BRIAN BASIC/GETTY IMAGES

LIVE & COMPILATIONS

BRUTALLY EDITED COMPILATIONS, PLUSH BOXSETS, INSTALLATION PIECES...
BUT NO GREATEST HITS? BY PETER WATTS

RELEASED: 1975–2022

ALTHOUGH Kraftwerk haven't released much in the way of new material in recent years, and certainly don't avoid playing their most popular songs during live shows, the band have so far refrained from releasing anything as mundane as a greatest-hits album. Leaving aside *The Mix*, the only compilations of studio material that have ever appeared are collections that draw on the first four albums. These albums were all compiled by labels in the UK and US before Kraftwerk regained control of their back catalogue in the early 1980s. Given how much the band's sound would change from *Autobahn* onwards, it's questionable what value these compilations actually offer, especially as tracks were often hacked drastically to fit them on the vinyl.

The first of these curios to come out in England was **EXCELLER 8** 1975, **VERTIGO** **, having been released on Vertigo following the success of "Autobahn". It's really more of a sampler than a true compilation, and not much cop even at that. It was intended to introduce the band's back catalogue – *Kraftwerk*, *Kraftwerk 2*, *Ralf Und Florian* and *Autobahn* – to a UK public that had unexpectedly taken the "Autobahn" single to just outside the Top 10. The problem is that the three-minute single edit of "Autobahn" that features on *Exceller 8* is completely

unlike anything else on the record, which features a variety of edits, some astonishingly brutal, of original material.

The first side is strongest. Here there's almost all of the excellent "Ruckzuck" from the debut album, which dispenses only with the intro, followed by "Autobahn" itself and then two tracks from *Ralf Und Florian* – the New Age titbit "Tongebirge" and the equally lovely "Kristallo". Side Two leads off with "Comet Melody 2", a three-minute edit of "Kometenmelodie II" that removes the entire middle section. It was released as a single but failed to chart. The rest of the second side is equally brutal. "King-Klang" from *Kraftwerk 2* was cut back to a mere nine minutes from the original 17, while "Vom Himmel [sic] Hoch" from *Kraftwerk* stripped six minutes from the original song, bringing it down to four minutes and misspelling the title in the process. Most drastic of all was "Stratovarius", which simply took a short 90-second excerpt from the song's final section and did away with the remaining 10 minutes.

Hütter and Schneider had little to do with any of this – it was compiled by Alan Cowderoy and engineered by Steve Brown – and unsurprisingly the album was deleted in 1980 and never issued on CD.

It was followed in 1981 by **ELEKTRO KINETIK** 1981, **VERTIGO** **, another selection of heavily edited songs that has long been deleted. This was compiled by Leon Campadelli, who was responsible for countless mid-price compilation reissues at Phonogram, of which Vertigo was a subsidiary. It came out as Vertigo's rights to the back catalogue came to a close but may have been hastened on to the market by the success of "Computer Love" (a UK No 1) and its parent album, *Computer World*. Leading the album is "Autobahn", or at least the first six-and-a-half

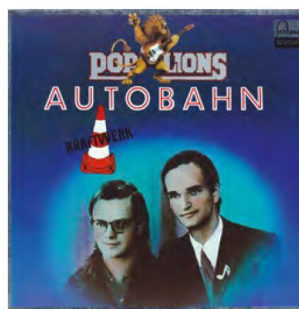
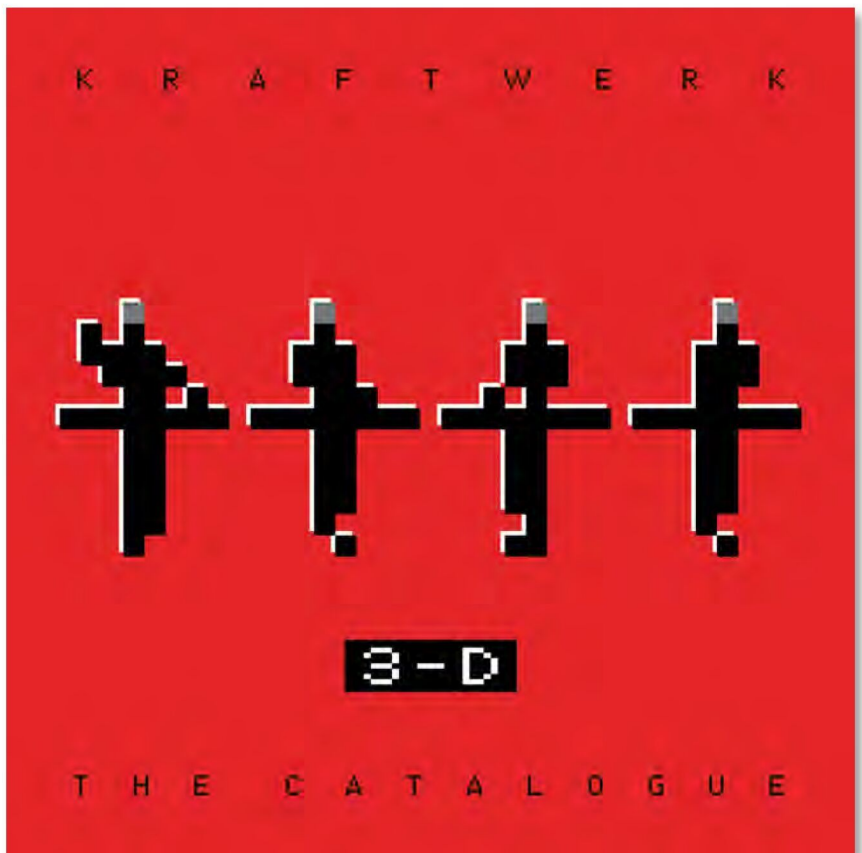
minutes of the album version. It's followed by "Ananas Symphonie" from *Ralf And Florian* – second half only, starting around seven minutes in with the white noise – and then pretty much all of "Strom" from *Kraftwerk 2*, excluding only the intro that sounds like the guitar is being tuned. Side One closes with the spectral "Mitternacht" from *Autobahn*.

The second side is better balanced. It fixes on unedited album tracks, choosing a number of shorter pieces for obvious reasons, and that seems to provide a sense of coherence. The

side starts with "Kometenmelodie II" then has "Heimatklänge" and "Tanzmusik" from *Ralf Und Florian* before closing with *Kraftwerk 2*'s reflective "Spule 4". It's an odd collection of sounds but overall works better than *Exceller 8*, offering a clearer window into the range of Kraftwerk's sound on those early albums.

**EXCELLER 8
IS REALLY
MORE OF A
SAMPLER
THAN A TRUE
COMPILATION**





What Vertigo were doing with *Exceller 8* and *Elektro Kinetik* in the UK, Fontana did with **HIGH RAIL** FONTANA, 1979**** and **AUTOBAHN** FONTANA, 1980** in the US. The first of these came out in 1979 and featured a similar, somewhat random collection of tracks from the first four albums, including a six-and-a-half-minute “Autobahn”, then all of “Vom Himmel Hoch”, “Ruckzuck”, “Spule 4”, “Kometenmelodie II” and “Wellenlänge”. It’s actually pretty good, and holds together well. *Autobahn* is less appealing, partly because of the truly awful cover and complicating title. This had yet another edit of “Autobahn”, followed by “Elektrisches Roulette”, “Tongebirge”, “Morgenspaziergang”, “Tanzmusik”, “Kometenmelodie 1” and “Mitternacht”.

One worthwhile find is the German compilation, **DOPPELALBUM**

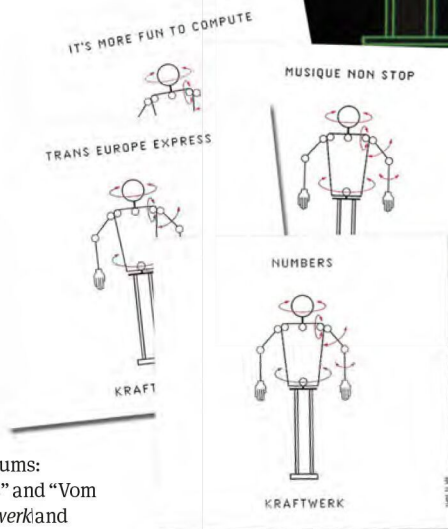
PHILIPS, 1976****, which spreads early tracks over two albums, granting an entire side to a full 22-minute “Autobahn”. With the exception of “Kometenmelodie II”, the remaining tracks all come from the first two albums: “Ruckzuck”, “Stratovarius” and “Vom Himmel Hoch” from *Kraftwerk I* and “Wellenlänge” and “Klingklang” from *Kraftwerk 2*. All are presented in unedited form and it’s a handsomely packaged affair. It was reissued in Germany in 1979, while the French version is called, confusingly, *Autobahn*. The German cassette release, incidentally, was titled *Doppelcassette* and came in a fetching radioactive yellow and black take on the classic motorway sign.

Kraftwerk have thus far refused to release any other compilations despite the obvious mass appeal of a single disc that contained the likes of “Autobahn”, “Showroom Dummies”, “The Model”, “The Robots” and “Tour De France”. In May 1997 they did release the very limited edition **KLANG BOX** KLINGKLANG, 1997****. This came out to mark the band’s gig at Tribal Gathering in Luton Hoo, their first appearance since 1992, and it came in an edition of just 250. As well as a Kraftwerk T-shirt, there were four 12-inch singles – “Trans-Europe Express” backed with an unreleased instrumental version; “Numbers”; “Musique Non-Stop”; and “Home Computer” backed with “It’s More Fun To Compute”.

A more complete box was planned for 2004 – some promos of these do exist – but it didn’t hit the shelves for another five years.

THE CATALOGUE KLINGKLANG, 2009**** contained all eight albums on CD from *Autobahn* to *Tour De France*, including *The Mix*. *Electric Café* is renamed *Techno Pop*, its original title. The albums were all beautifully digitally remastered by Ralf Hütter, sharpening the sound to an intense degree of precision, with each CD repackaged as a mini-LP, an outside sleeve showing new artwork and the inner sleeve the original cover. The accompanying LP-sized books,

The Kraftwerk robots: unimpressed by the audience’s sense of rhythm at the Muffathalle in Munich, April 5, 2004



version for serious authenticocrats, followed by a limited German edition of 3,340 copies that came out in 2013 to commemorate the 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Tour. There was, though, nothing in the way of additional material bar a funky 1987 remix of “House Phone” that replaced the original eight-minute version of “The Telephone Call” – the latter was included in its shorter single-mix version. “Unfortunately we don’t have much unreleased material,” said Hütter. “We never recorded extra songs or 20 different versions of the same song. We’d complete a song then move forward, always keeping very focused on one Kling Klang project at a time.”

As the title suggests, *The Catalogue* is Kraftwerk in excelsis. Pre-1974 material, random singles and live albums are essentially deemed non-canonical and expelled from the library. That means you don’t get any sense of a band finding their feet through those three early albums, but instead arriving pretty much fully formed with “Autobahn”. The box cements the impression that like master novelists, Kraftwerk approached each LP as a self-contained unit that collectively add up to a saga – if you were then to throw in every rarity, live or unreleased track, you’d end up muddying the water when the band are striving to deliver ever more clarity of sound and expression. To put it plainly, these guys worked too damn hard for too

one for each album, had additional photography and information about personnel. There was a German

long trying to get it exactly right to want to show you when they got it wrong. The box is a gorgeous item and pretty hard to find. 2020 brought individual reissues of the albums on coloured vinyl with booklet supplements, and also (a more valuable supplement) releases for the five albums (from *Trans-Europe Express* to *The Mix*), which exist in German language versions. *Computerwelt*, especially, is a delight.

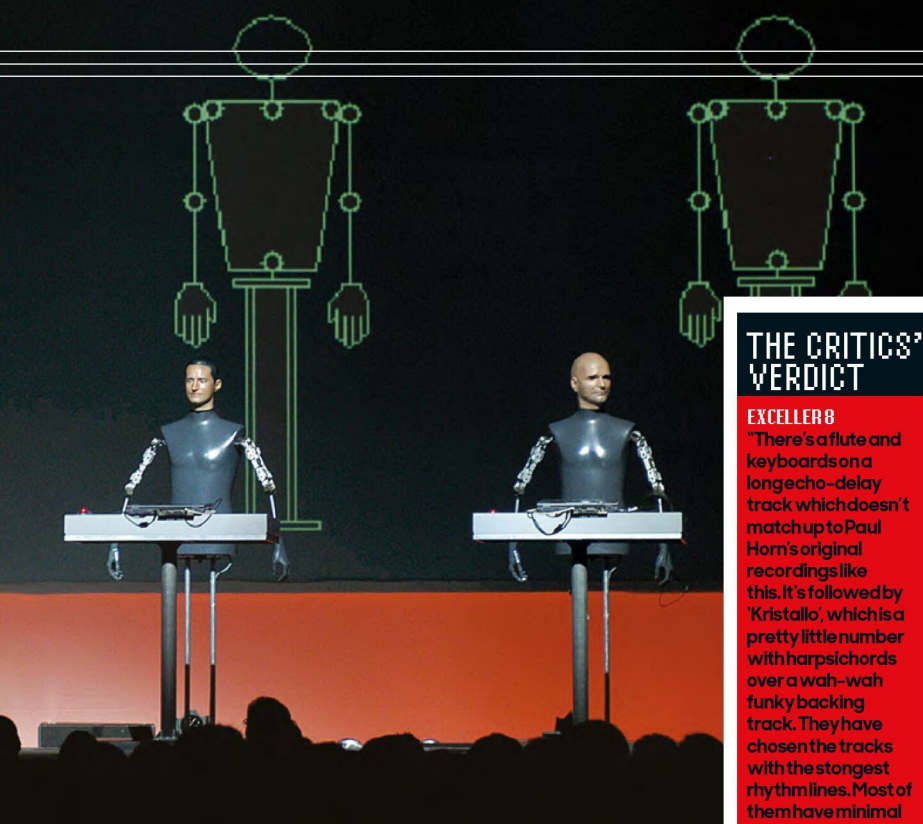
THE CATALOGUE was reissued in 2012 via New York’s Museum Of Modern Art in a limited-edition black box of 2,000. That was to celebrate the band’s appearance at the museum during their 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Tour of the world’s museums and concert halls, a tour that was essentially a huge and ambitious celebration of *The Catalogue* and was then collected itself as **3-D THE CATALOGUE** KLINGKLANG, 2017****. This came in several formats. The peak item was

the deluxe four-disc Blu-ray/book edition that put the shows on two discs, and the tour film and projections on the other two, all in 3D with Dolby Atmos 5.1 audio. There was also a beautiful 236-page hardback book with a huge selection of images from the tour. Next came the nine-LP version (*The Mix* is a double LP), followed by the eight-CD box. For dabblers, dilettantes and the hard-of-cash, there was a single CD/2LP version that cut the four hours of music down to a mere 77 minutes and in the process created the closest thing you

will ever get to a Kraftwerk Greatest Hits bar *The Mix*. You can also get this shortened version on DVD and Blu-ray so you can appreciate the full experience in concentrated form.

The release of *3-D The Catalogue* could be seen

3-D THE CATALOGUE
CAPTURES THE
MOMENT THE
BAND REALLY
REINVENTED
THEMSELVES



THE CRITICS' VERDICT

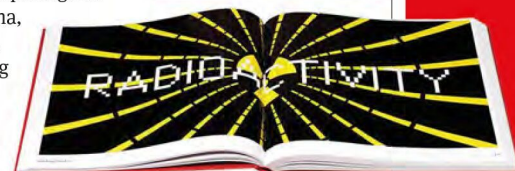
EXCELLER 8

"There's a flute and keyboards on a long echo-delay track which doesn't match up to Paul Horn's original recordings like this. It's followed by 'Kristallo', which is a pretty little number with harpsichords over a wah-wah funky backing track. They have chosen the tracks with the strongest rhythmic lines. Most of them have minimal improvisation played over them on flute or keyboards, but there is of course a 'buzzing of gnats and ships bumping in the night' track. Or is it a maniacal motorcycle race? Buzz-bombs back again?"

MILES, NME, JANUARY 31, 1976

as one of the most important in the band's discography as it captures the moment the band really reinvented themselves. There might not have been a great deal in the way of new material for the past decade or so, but instead here was an entirely new and innovative way of presenting themselves and their history. The concerts took place all over the world – from LA's Walt Disney Concert Hall to Sydney Opera House via prestigious venues in London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Bilbao, Düsseldorf and Tokyo – with Kraftwerk playing each album in chronological order in every city. The audience wore 3D glasses to appreciate the visuals as Kraftwerk effectively turned themselves into something close to an installation for eight days. The albums weren't quite played as they appear on the records; instead there were edits and changes to tracklisting in an attempt to create a more seamless symphonic experience. The most drastic example was *Trans-Europe Express*, which is cut almost in half. Several tracks are also performed in their updated *The Mix* versions rather than as originally recorded.

Musically, it's studio-quality perfection throughout. There is no crowd noise either, so it's only when you listen to some of the vocals, for example the slightly wobbly singing on "Radioactivity", that you get a sense of this being a live performance. The concerts were conceived as an audio-visual experience, and it works best when you have the visual accompaniment to the music. That gives you the truly wonderful combination of pioneering music and retro-futuristic 3D graphics with the four members of the band at their plinths in *Tron* suits, unwittingly



awaiting their deification into meme-hood as the hook for a thousand "worst Kraftwerk gig EVER" gags after every political debate. These visual moments are as sublime as the music – the floating neon signs for "Neon Lights", the Bauhaus graphics of "The Man-Machine", the naivety of "Autobahn", the 8-bit ominous warning of "Radioactivity" – allowing viewers to relive and absorb a unique experience.

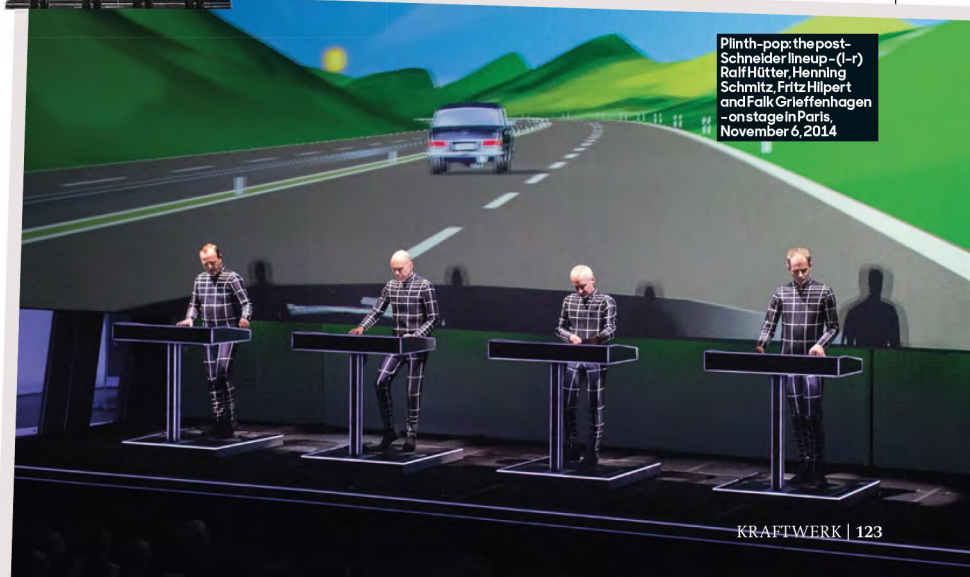
Before *3-D The Catalogue* emerged, Kraftwerk released the more conventional live album

MINIMUM-MAXIMUM KUNGKLING, 2005 *****.

Recorded during the world tour of 2004, it included concerts from Warsaw, Moscow, Berlin, London, Budapest, Tallinn, Riga, Tokyo and San Francisco. Hütter later said he was disappointed that the album was mixed before he could include tracks recorded in Santiago as "Chileans were the only audience in the world who clap in time, in perfect synchronisation". The double album was also available as a DVD.

Kraftwerk have played live constantly through their career and you can get bootlegs going right back to 1971 – the Radio Bremen recording is a krautrock classic featuring a Florian-Dinger-Rother lineup that Kraftwerk tried to replicate in the studio but abandoned in favour of Kraftwerk 2, leading to Rother and Dinger forming Neu!. Following the success of *Autobahn*, these concerts saw Kraftwerk increasingly try to recreate their experimental studio sounds on stage with analogue synths and drum pads, which created far more capacity for chance and happenstance than you can find on the meticulous official live recordings. *Minimum-Maximum*, then, is a beautiful recording of a band striving for and frequently attaining perfection, but it feels somewhat redundant in the post-*3-D The Catalogue* era. There's absolutely nothing to dislike though – the sound of the crowd adds atmosphere and some tracks seem to have been given additional verve by the concert setting, although that's not an easy thing to quantify in the circumstances. The setlist includes the song "Planet Of Visions", which is based on Underground Resistance's 2001 remix of "Expo 2000", one of the cornerstones of the double-CD set **REMIXES** KUNGKLING, 2022 *****. This collects reworked versions of classics from *Home Computer* to *Tour De France* by luminaries including UR, Hot Chip and William Orbit. 🚀

Plinth-pop: the post-Schneider lineup – (l-r) Ralf Hütter, Henning Schmitz, Fritz Hilpert and Falk Grieffenhagen – on stage in Paris, November 6, 2014





DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"The lyrics in 'Showroom Dummies' are our day-to-day reality": Kraftwerk's 3-D video installation at the Lenbach House in Munich, October 13, 2011

"WE WERE ON OUR WAY TO ROBOTISATION..."

Weapons-grade instruments, computerised societies, police raids and feeling "photographed to death" – RALF HÜTTER decompresses the Kraftwerk Katalog, with its train symphonies, car-sound continuums and "infiltration by radio station". Und wo ist Florian? "We haven't seen him for a long time," he tells STEPHEN DALTON. "He always hated touring and concerts..."





Hütter, Emil Schult and Schneider at their 'motherhip', the Kling Klang studio, Düsseldorf, February 1973

UNCUT OCTOBER 2009



HE might have spent most of the past two decades cocooned in the Kubrickian perfectionism of his secret Kling Klang studio in Düsseldorf, but Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter is on unusually warm form when *Uncut* joins him for a rare face-to-face chat. Still surprisingly boyish at 62, the founding father of techno-pop, electro, techno, house and hip-hop radiates sly mischief and ultra-dry German humour.

The acrimonious departure last year of Hütter's fellow Kraftwerk founder, Florian Schneider, is still a sensitive subject. "We haven't seen him for a long time," Hütter shrugs. "I cannot speak for my former partner, friend and co-composer, but he always hated touring and concerts."

In 2009, Kraftwerk are in the middle of their busiest creative phase for years, with a revamped studio setup and new album in gestation. This year alone they have played sold-out shows around the world, including a South American tour with Radiohead, and next month they release *Der Katalog* – their eight biggest albums in sumptuous, digitally remastered versions. The perfect time, then, for the elusive Hütter to relive four decades inside one of the greatest enigmas in music...



KRAFTWERK

VERTIGO, 1970

Leaving behind their long-haired student jazz-rock band, Organisation, Hütter and Schneider established both the Kraftwerk name and their Kling Klang studio with this free-form instrumental four-track debut. Features a guest appearance by Klaus Dinger, later of Krautrock legends Neu!. But don't use the K-word around Ralf...

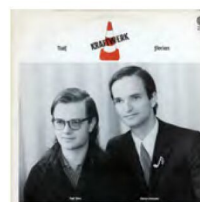
"We were finding Kraftwerk, setting up the Kling Klang studio, finding musicians to work with, discovering composition, discovering the German language, human voice, synthetic voice. Me and Florian had our Kling Klang studio since 1970, and before that we had a free-form music group. We used to play at universities or parties or art galleries. And one day we said: OK, there must be a motherhip, a laboratory, a studio HQ where we put things together.

"We were mostly like the art-scene bands, always on the same bill as Can. We had different drummers, and we engaged Klaus Dinger one time, but always changing. We had jazz drummers, rock drummers, and I had my little drum machine.

"This name, krautrock – it's coming

from some idiots, I don't know who, but it was never used in those times. The music was called Deutsch Rock, or electro rock, underground music, free rock. It really had no name, and it also had different colours in different cities. Like from Berlin it was more cosmic, with Cluster and Tangerine Dream. We were from Düsseldorf, so more industrial, and Can in Cologne were more rock-orientated.

"This name was later introduced by people who maybe like this music, but it's an insult, and it's also nonsense because we don't eat sauerkraut. And the music wasn't made by vegetables. It's like saying 'fish and chips music', or 'spaghetti music'. It's great that people can see the creativity, but maybe you can think of a more intelligent name?"



RALF & FLORIAN

VERTIGO, 1973

Emphasising their status as a duo, Hütter and Schneider began to formulate a more polished, minimal, electronic sound on their transitional third album. This hard-to-find rarity is now due for re-release in the next wave of remasters.

"We were a duo all the time, we just had different studio musicians. But we were always looking for the perfect beat to be played by machines. We tried again and again, but it just never worked out, because they were never in sync. We were close to the visual arts scene in Düsseldorf, that is very important for Kraftwerk. It was audio-visual music because of the paintings and soundscapes. Words cannot really



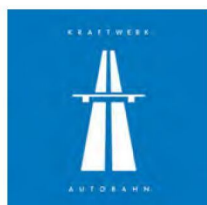


describe this, but you can actually see our music, I think...

"We listened to quite a lot of electronic stuff at that time. On the art scene, and on the radio. We were brought up within the kind of classical Beethoven school

of music, but we were aware there was a contemporary music scene, and of course a pop and rock scene. But where was our music? Finding our voice, I think that was the use of the tape recorder. So that's what happened, we tried to forget all the things we knew before. I think our contact to the tape recorder made us use synthetic voices, artificial personalities, all those robotic ideas.

"I'm working on the album tapes with my old friend, Emil Schult. This should maybe be our next interview, but it will be *Kraftwerk 1* and *2*, *Ralf & Florian*, and maybe one or two live ambient situations, whatever we find in the archive. It's all in one part of our Kling Klang studio archives, but it needs some more work, redusting and remastering. There are lots of drawings and concepts, ideas that maybe a decade or two later came into reality. There have been bootlegs of these albums, but they are all printed from vinyl. Nobody has the tapes. Only we have the tapes."



AUTOBAHN

VERTIGO, 1974

Kraftwerk's mainstream breakthrough, marking their emergence as revolutionary electro-

pop minimalists. A condensed version of the mesmerising 22-minute title track became an international hit, leading to tours on both sides of the Atlantic. Some even saw its "*fahren, fahren, fahren*" refrain as a sly Beach Boys homage...

"*Autobahn* was about finding our artistic situation: where are we? What is the sound of the German Bundesrepublik? Because at this time bands were having English names, and not using the German language. Some people have said we introduced German rap, but it's not really rap, its *sprechgesang* – spoken-word singing. And from these rhythms and sounds we developed musical landscapes.

"It's not about cars, it's about the *Autobahn*. People forget that. It's a road where we were travelling all the time: hundreds of thousands of kilometres from university to art galleries, from club to home. We didn't even have money to stay in hotels, so at night we'd be travelling home after

playing somewhere. That's very important – it's not about cars, it's about the *Autobahn*. It's also a road movie, with a humorous twist.

"The white stripes on the road, I noticed them driving home every day from the studio, 20 kilometres on the *Autobahn*. And then the car sounds, the radio – it's like a loop, a continuum, part of the endless music of Kraftwerk. In *Autobahn* we put car sounds, horn, basic melodies and tuning motors. Adjusting the suspension and tyre pressure, rolling on the asphalt, that gliding sound – pffft pffft – when the wheels go onto those painted stripes. It's sound poetry, and also very dynamic.

"In the case of The Beach Boys, that song is about a T-Bird: '*She had fun, fun, fun until daddy took her T-Bird away.*' But ours is about a Volkswagen or Mercedes. The quote is really more ethnic. People said: are you doing surfing on the Rhine? Yes, maybe, but we don't have

waves. It's like an artificial joke. But no, it's not a Beach Boys record, it's a Kraftwerk record.

"All the tracks are like film loops, short films. '*Morgenspaziergang*' [roughly translated as '*morning stroll*'] is what we wrote when we came out of the studio. We were always working at night and then in the morning, everything seems fresh and our ears are open again. Everything silent.

"We toured with *Autobahn* for the first time outside Germany. Just once in Paris University was our first time outside Germany, I think in

'73. But with *Autobahn* we also toured a very long time in America, then a shorter tour in England. But Germany had to be cancelled because there was no interest. That was in '75.

"The record was a very big success but nobody could imagine it live – is this a studio record? Or electronic? Nobody thought about going to see Kraftwerk behind the *Autobahn* record. Before that

"THE POLICE
WOULD BE COMING
IN WITH PULLED
GUNS SAYING,
'WHERE ARE THE
WEAPONS?'"



we toured in Germany all the time, from the late '60s up to 1973. But then three years later nobody wanted to see us again. We came back in 1981, but still it was nothing like other countries."



RADIO-ACTIVITY

WARNERBROS, 1975

Kraftwerk's first all-electronic album, a nocturnal nightmare soundtrack with a dual meaning: the sound of crackling

transistors and Cold War paranoia. Recorded during the Baader-Meinhof trials, which divided Germany and turned even young musicians into terrorist suspects.

"It's a science-fiction kind of album. Horror and beauty. The concept was infiltration by radio station – which is maybe more dangerous than radioactivity. We worked with tapes, editing pieces, glue. All electronics. And more singing and speaking, like speech symphonies.

"It was written in two languages, English and German. *Autobahn* was just one. It was not a statement, just these lyrics came to our mind – "*Radioactivity, is in the air for you and me...*" Just ideas coming together, and then anticipating the next album, which was all in two languages, like in films. There were always talks about Kraftwerk working with films, but they didn't happen – apart from [German director Rainer Werner] Fassbinder, but he used finished pieces of our music in different interpretations in his films. *Radio-Activity* was a favourite of Fassbinder – he used it in *Russian Roulette* and in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

"When we were working on the artwork we had these long rolled posters, so our neighbours were reporting that we had weapons – that was the whole situation at that time. We travelled late at night and we'd be stopped for controls, Düsseldorf is a very controlled city, so they stop your cars and ask for your papers and permits. We were very night people, club-scene people. They stopped us on the *Autobahn*,

going to the studio. The police even came to our studio – because of the noise maybe. But they didn't come and knock on the door, they'd be coming in with pulled guns saying, 'Where are the weapons?'"



TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS

CAPITOL, 1977

A romantic hymn to European integration, *Trans-Europe Express* earned its place in pop history as an unlikely catalyst for the nascent New York hip-hop scene, which liberally sampled its pounding metallic beats and piston-pumping rhythms. Hilarious sleeve artwork depicts the band as impeccably neat young businessmen.

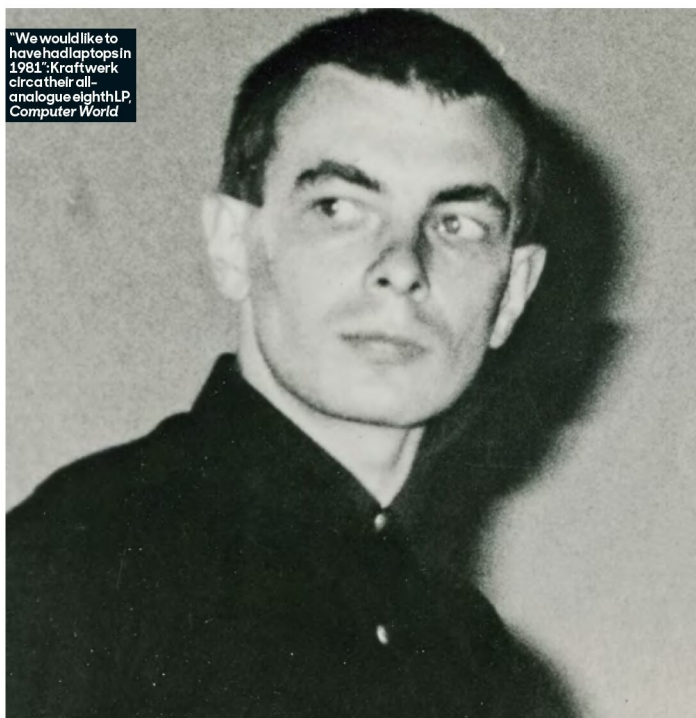
"*Trans-Europe Excess* is basically a symphony of trains – train noises, Vienna, Paris. Travel is a big part of Kraftwerk. The pictures are not ironic, that's our reality, that's the life we are experiencing. That's our cultural identity as Europeans, with the spirit of European culture. As you know, in Düsseldorf we live 20 minutes from the Netherlands, half an hour from Belgium, two hours from France. Berlin is farther away than Paris, even without the Wall. With all our friends, and at school, English language was very prominent. Living in Germany at that time, it was quite normal to talk in different languages.

"Hall Of Mirrors' was written very fast. The mirror is a big theme with artists – like 'Man In The Mirror' by Michael Jackson, and many others. At one time we also had mirrors as part of our Kling Klang studio to get visual feedback. There are some beautiful covers of that song. I like the version on the [Kraftwerk tribute] *Trans Slovenia Express* album, I think it is Anne Clarke singing to some Slovenian sounds. And also during the punk period, Siouxsie And The Banshees played that song.

"Showroom Dummies', that is the transition from human to dummy to robots, from posing and static to animation and motorising. We were on our way to robotisation... is that a word? We are mainly talking about ourselves in that song, we felt photographed to death. That's why we brought in the dummies, and later robots, because they have more patience with photographers. The lyrics in 'Showroom Dummies' are our day-to-day reality, going to clubs. In Germany the clubs are open very late; we don't have that curfew like in England, the last drink at 9.30 or something. Ha! We are not playing that song at the moment but we played it a lot in '81, and I think we will play it again because it's valid.



"We would like to have had laptops in 1981." Kraftwerk circa their all-analogue eighth LP, *Computer World*



"We received a Disco Award for that album in America – Best European Disco Band or something, it was very funny. I was in New York when the record came out doing some promo and then somebody from Capitol Records, the disco department or whatever, took us to some after-hours illegal clubs. I went with Florian and we were doing our little dance, and they played 'Metal On Metal'. We knew the record because it was fairly new – but it went for five minutes, 10, 15, 20 minutes. What was happening? Then we found out they had two acetates, two pressings, and it was Bambaataa playing. Fantastic live DJing – that was in '77, when they began experimenting with acetate like that. 'Planet Rock' was five years later, and first of all they forgot to print my name. We had no credit, so we

called our publishers – and now they have our names on the record. Maybe that was because it was just a club record for a few thousand people, but then it exploded."



THE MAN-MACHINE

CAPITOL, 1978

Increasingly mechanised and minimal, this blueprint finds Kraftwerk at their

most humorous, from the deadpan disco-funk of "The Robots" to the prophetic celebrity snapshot "The Model", a future UK No 1 whose pointedly satirical



subtext is sometimes overlooked. Also includes the much-covered romantic ballad, "Neon Lights".

"At one point, playing an arts centre nearly 10 years before 'The Robots', I had this drum machine working; we were playing with feedback and strobe lights. We left the stage and people kept dancing to the machines. We didn't have Kraftwerk, we didn't have the robots, we didn't have *The Man-Machine* album, nothing – but the concepts were already there.

"The lyrics to 'The Model' are identical in both languages, I think. I translated them. There is no difference. It's about the context of an object, paying money: for beauty we will pay. I think the cynicism is obvious, don't you? And then we'd get asked by everyone in clubs we went: is it me?

Who is this? But it's not based on anybody.

"The words are more like musical keys or clues, like in *Autobahn* or *The Man-Machine*, the sound says it all. Because we work so much with machines, the best music is playing itself – maybe through me, or through my friends and colleagues, but it's coming from itself. That's what we try to do. It's not always possible, but we try our best. The ultimate speech composition is 'Boing Boom Tschak' [from '86's *Electric Cafe*] because the music speaks itself. It's also endless, because once you have that concept you can go on for five minutes, five hours or five days."



COMPUTER WORLD

EMI, 1981

In a pre-digital age, Kraftwerk predict a computer-dominated future with pristine melodies and supple rhythms. But behind the surface shimmer lies a message about a new era of electronic surveillance...

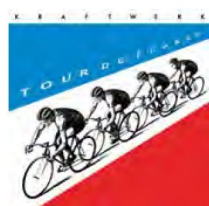
"We didn't even have computers. Even though the music was created by synthesisers and sequencers, it was analogue, pre-computer. We got our first home computers after the album was finished, the first Ataris. But no, it wasn't a warning, it was reality. We were there, even though the album wasn't made on computers, it was our reality. Society was being computerised; a lot of people didn't notice at that time, but we did. Computers were being used by states, the KGB, Interpol, Deutsche Bank.

"It was also talking about us: Kraftwerk, the Kling Klang studio, that was our computer world. We computerised our faces, and automated some of the lyrics. And 'Pocket Calculator', again it was really anticipating some kind of mobility. It really was made on a pocket calculator and toy instruments, like a Stylophone and a small children's keyboard.

"We would like to have had laptops in 1981, but computers were huge IBMs, and they were not even transportable. The first Apple came in the late 1970s, but it was not available for us.

When we first took our digital equipment into Eastern Bloc countries we had to list all of our equipment, because they were also part of weapons technology. We had to prove they are used for music and not weapons. Everything had to be listed, each piece of

equipment, each brand name. Not from their side, from our side, in case you are bringing high-tech rocket material into the Eastern Bloc. But no, we were making art and music."



TOUR DE FRANCE

EMI, 2003

Decades in gestation – building on their 1983 single of the same name – Hütter and Schneider's final collaboration pays

homage to their shared love of cycling. Originally released as *Tour De France Soundtracks*, it is now being reissued with its shorter intended title.

"It's just called *Tour De France*. The soundtracks was just a tracklisting at that time. It's different films again, different soundtracks: 'Vitamin', 'Aero Dynamik', 'Titanium'. But it's also about personal experience, about regeneration, like a training plan.

"Sometimes we forget about things and they

come back to us, they get a new meaning and a new dynamic, and then we find the concentration to finish a piece of work. *Tour De France* was all written before as scripts, notes, keywords, lyrics and concepts. In '83, with the *Tour*, in a rush we released the single. Then it suddenly disappeared as we worked on digital technology, samplers, digitising our studio.

"And then, the 100 years' birthday of the *Tour* was the signal to finish the album. All the mixes we did during the *Tour*, when we were invited by the directors to follow by

helicopters and in the director's car. Then we returned for the final mix. And when the *Tour* came to Paris, we delivered the tapes.

"Sometimes I get criticised for taking so long with the last album, but I can only answer that *Autobahn* took 28 years to make. Kraftwerk, and pre-Kraftwerk, was like seven years of working. People think you walk into a studio, turn some knobs and a new album is finished. That might be the case for one song. Maybe one record, maybe two – but not a lifetime's work." ▲

"BECAUSE WE
WORK SO
MUCH WITH
MACHINES, THE
BEST MUSIC IS
PLAYING ITSELF"

Neon tights: video technician Stefan Pfaffe (right) joins the live lineup at Global Gathering in Brisbane, Australia, a week after the abrupt departure of Florian Schneider, November 29, 2008



Sounds "unheard before": Schneider with Kraftwerk at Alex Cooley's Electric Ballroom, Atlanta, Georgia, April 21, 1975



"HIS IDEAS WILL STAY WITH ME"

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER | 1947–2020

In 2020, Neu!'s MICHAEL ROTHER – briefly a member of Kraftwerk in the early 1970s – remembered FLORIAN SCHNEIDER and his "thoroughly exciting" musical vision.



THE news of Florian Schneider's passing hit me like a blow. Even though we hadn't met or spoken for many years, he was always firmly in my mind as one of the most important musical figures of my life. In the late '60s, we were both pupils at the same school in Düsseldorf [Rethel Gymnasium], and I noticed this guy

with an awkward way of walking who played flute in the classical orchestra. He was obviously different from all the other pupils, an outsider.

"We didn't talk then, but in early 1971, when I was serving time in a mental hospital as a conscientious objector and feeling very lonely with my wish of creating a new music that was not based on Anglo-American rock/pop roots and structures, coincidence led me to a studio in Düsseldorf where some film music was to be recorded. The name of the band working in that studio was Kraftwerk.

"I didn't know the band and thought the name rather silly, but the musicians Ralf Hütter, with whom I jammed there, and Florian Schneider, who only listened to our session, changed my world. Shortly after this first meeting, Florian called me and invited me to join Kraftwerk and to play some concerts.

"Florian had a unique metal construction on stage on which he assembled his effect units and a mixer. He played an electrified violin which he ran through a fuzz box and a

wah-wah pedal, a flute which he treated with delay and a unit that changed the pitch to one octave down. Especially this flute, and the way Florian played it like a crazy fast-forward bass, was thoroughly exciting and unheard before. Unfortunately, the sound engineers who did the recordings at *Beat Club* [TV] and Radio Bremen didn't understand that Florian's contributions to our sound were much more interesting and vital than my guitar playing, and so they put Florian too low in the audio mix.

"The trio with Florian, Klaus Dinger on drums and myself on guitar only lasted for five or six months, but I remember some truly exciting concerts, and everything that followed in my musical life had a connection to this beginning with Ralf and Florian. After we separated in July 1971, Klaus and I continued as a duo [Neu!] and Florian got back together with Ralf Hütter.

"We met again in 1974 when I played Harmonia's first album to Ralf and Florian. I remember being happy that they were impressed. Florian called me later in 1974 and asked whether I'd be interested in joining them for a Kraftwerk tour [for

Autobahn], but at that time I was happily working with Harmonia and also Neu!, and therefore declined the offer.

"In later years, the music of Kraftwerk always stayed on my horizon although I didn't put the records on at home myself. Friends of mine who were big fans of Kraftwerk played them, and until today, I admire the reduction and clarity in their music. Florian and his ideas will stay with me and the many musicians he influenced." ▲

"THE MUSIC
STAYED ON
MY HORIZON.
I ADMIRE THE
CLARITY"
MICHAEL ROTHER

"I'M NOT INTERESTED IN KRAFTWERK SEMINARS"

Uncut is granted an audience with **KARL BARTOS**. The ex-Kraftwerk man on the secrets of Kling Klang, nights out with Neil Tennant, and Cliff Richard's influence on New York electro. Later, *NME* quizzes Karl on his illustrious past, and finds he really did invent Atomic Kitten.



UNCUT OCTOBER 2022



FOR a musician synonymous with the interface between music and technology, Karl Bartos's Hamburg home studio is surprisingly spartan. "I have a piano, a Martin D-28 guitar and a computer," he reveals. "The core of my old equipment like the MiniMoog and the Arp synthesiser is still there, but they seem to retire now. Usually I go out and record something in the streets."

Rather than creating his own sounds, Bartos is currently concerned with paying deeper attention to those that already exist around us. "Ambience is really great. I've learned a lot from John Cage about that – he said the great symphony is if you go to a crossroads and listen to the rhythm of the cars. Around here you hear ships all the time. But basically anything makes a symphony. It's really a great variety of noises in this world."

Bartos was always a versatile musician. In his memoir *The Sound Of The Machine*, recently translated into English, he describes hot-footing it between Kraftwerk's Kling Klang studio and the orchestra pit at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, while also playing drums in a rock'n'roll band

and vibraphone in a jazz quartet. The range of influences that powered minimalist masterpieces like *The Man-Machine* and *Computer World* was broader than you think. "I always listen to music as a whole," says Bartos, settling down to answer your questions. "It's all the sound of being human."

Can you describe your feelings the first time you entered Kling Klang studio and played the electronic drums?

JOHN DENSMORE, SUNDERLAND
The atmosphere was like what you can read about Andy Warhol's Factory. It was this big variety of useless things and useful things. In one corner of the room I saw a neon lamp, and so I had this feeling of an art place, not really a musical studio. The first time I went there, we played at a low level. I had these knitting needles in my hand and the sound of them hitting the metal pad was very loud in the room. You can't really use your technique, if you have a knitting needle!

So I get along, and it was OK. But the next time we played full volume, and that makes a difference because then suddenly the sounds

were much louder than a normal drum set. The articulation was very low, you had just one boom! But over the years we developed a style of modulating it through machines, technical effects, and so on.

"WHAT HAPPENED WITH KRAFTWERK WAS THE AESTHETICISATION OF TECHNOLOGY"
KARL BARTOS

It was an interesting challenge, and it opened my ears to things I knew already. Sly & The Family Stone, they were using a drum machine but I didn't notice so much because it was deep in the music. What happened with Kraftwerk was the aestheticisation of technology. Like the Eiffel Tower – there's no facade, it's just this pure skeleton.

I'd like to know something about *Die Mensch-Maschine*: which riffs did you write for that album?

ADRIANO BONELLI, ITALY

Basically I wrote on every song, so it's not just a riff for a rhythm. For instance, my first copyright was "Metropolis". I don't know where it came from but I was caught by this Latin American riff – you know these Cuban piano players, a very syncopated riff. I twisted it around and brought it in the studio, and that was it!

"Ambience is really great" Karl Bartos
tunes into the
sound of the streets
in London, 2013



You've helped shape electronic music and pop culture as a whole. However, what's the one thing you feel that goes unappreciated about Kraftwerk?

OLLIE STOREY, VIA EMAIL

From my personal point of view, we didn't invent so much, because it was all there before. There was electronic sound with Pierre Schaeffer in France who invented *musique concrète*, treating everyday sounds as it were music. And if you listen carefully to "Yellow Submarine", what you will discover is that it has this *musique concrète* atmosphere. Everybody is hitting metal stakes or making other noises, so it's really an acoustic film. This is the idea Kraftwerk took on, but the main difference between us and all these predecessors is that we made [people] aware of the nature of technology and tried not to hide the technology behind a wooden panel. This is maybe what has been overlooked all the time in Kraftwerk.

What did you think when you first heard Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock"?

LAURENCE GIBBS, WALTHAMSTOW, LONDON

I was with Ralf [Hütter] on the dancefloor in Cologne. There were so many good records at this moment, all these electronic pop sounds. But "Planet Rock" was a celebration of the dancefloor in a different style than disco. Disco was just marching music, I thought – the marching drums! They picked up my beat, the "Numbers" beat, apparently with an 808 machine. But actually I played it by hand with another record in mind. You know Cliff Richard, the funny singer with the great voice? He recorded a song [originally by Bobby Freeman] called "Do You Wanna Dance?" The drummer, Brian Bennett, he played an introduction – four or eight bars – and when I was very young I thought, 'Wow!' The drumbeat was so cool and this song stuck in my mind. And for some reason on this evening at the Kling Klang studio, my subconscious is bringing the feeling of this drumbeat and I played somehow the feeling inside – not the drumbeat itself, but my subconscious did a transformation. This got really lost in the computer age because it's so simple to make an acoustic photograph of the event or sample it directly. But sometimes it's better to climb the mountain instead of using a cable car.

In the German edition of your autobiography, you noted that you still had the Kling Klang studio session tapes. Is it a possibility these could be released in the future?

JAMES TESTA, VIA EMAIL

The gentleman has to wait until I die! I can't release it – I will face some problems if I do. Maybe I will find a museum to make a *real* [Kraftwerk] retrospective. I don't hear the tapes very often, but when I wrote the book, I was

"I'm not into making entertainment music": Bartos in his studio in Düsseldorf



listening to it. And it brought me back to this idea I have of the Kling Klang studio as a room where time was revolving around itself on the tape machine. Now, if you open up a computer, nothing is revolving, there's no air to breathe inside the computer's virtual space and nothing happens. It kills communication. When we first introduced a computer in the studio, we didn't play any more. We didn't look each other in the eye and couldn't play.

What would have been your preferred direction for Kraftwerk to go in during the '90s, had you remained a part of the band?

BEAU WADDELL, VIA EMAIL

Play live! We didn't play live after 1981 until 1990. So it was ridiculous. Also, we just did one record – and after we came up with *Electric Cafe* we made a terrible mistake, to remix our own records. In the second half of the '80s, we were listening too much to what's going on in the world and on other records. We went to the dancefloor and played our songs there, and we compared them to other tracks like competition. And from autonomous artists, we changed into sound designers.

I read somewhere that Ralf was the bad cop and Florian [Schneider] was the good cop – is that how you remember them?

PETER FORS, STOCKHOLM

They were actually much alike. They came both

from a very wealthy background – they had deep pockets! If you come from an elite background, what you're looking for, what you've been told, is that you've got to have success. As long as we were successful, everything was OK. And then in the middle of the '80s we did *Electric Cafe*, and it wasn't so successful. It was really a flop. And at the same time, everybody was now using

electronic drums, electronic keyboards, synthesizers. My elite friends Ralf and Florian, they were overwhelmed by that. And so they stopped working. We were stuck in the studio for almost 10 years, and that was too much for me in the end.

After Kraftwerk you worked with Johnny Marr and Bernard Sumner on an Electronic album. How did you adapt to their more hedonistic world?

DAVE FANSHAW, KEIGHLEY

Hedonistic? I don't know, they're amazing good musicians. They

came to visit me in my studio when I still lived in Düsseldorf and it was just instant, I liked them very much. They were very funny and very serious at the same time – like music! We spent quite a lot of time together. We went to the Hacienda, and I went to Berlin with Bernard for the Love Parade. So we had good times together. Our night out with Neil Tennant in Soho? It was very private! He took us to some really good places and we were cruising through Soho in the night. But I want to remain friends, you know?

"WE MADE
A TERRIBLE
MISTAKE,
TO REMIX OUR
OWN RECORDS"
KARL BARTOS



DOES ROCK'N'ROLL KILL BRAINCELLS?!

KARL BARTOS INTERVIEWED BY GARY RYAN

NME JULY 8, 2022

1 Which UK girl band did you help invent?

"[Laughs] Atomic Kitten."

CORRECT. *Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark* (OMD)'s frontman **Andy McCluskey**, who formed *Atomic Kitten*, claimed that you suggested he create a girl group, adding: "Kraftwerk invented Atomic Kitten."

"They were a nice band. It was during the time his OMD co-founder Paul Humphreys had left the band, and Andy had released OMD's *Sugar Tax* album on his own and was feeling alone. I suggested he was such an excellent songwriter, he should become a producer – instead of putting 300 per cent effort into OMD, just create a girl group. He took me by surprise that he actually did it! Andy and I have written the fantastic songs 'Mathew Street', 'Kissing The Machine' and 'The Moon And The Sun' together and I enjoy working with him."

2 Which 1970s Salford band used Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express" as their walk-on music during gigs?

"I've no idea!"

WRONG. It was Joy Division. Bassist **Peter Hook** once told *NME*: "Ian [Curtis, late Joy Division frontman] suggested that every time Joy Division go on stage, we should do so to "Trans-Europe Express". We did that from our first show until nearly our last".

You later ended up working with Joy Division/New Order's Bernard Sumner on his second Electronic – the supergroup he formed with Johnny Marr – album, 1996's *Raise The Pressure*... "Bernard's a real

soulmate but he didn't tell me Joy Division played any Kraftwerk songs before they entered the stage. I didn't read about it in *NME*! [Laughs] Working with Electronic rescued me. It was shortly after I left Kraftwerk [in 1990] and he sent me a fax, handwritten, asking to work with me, which was flattering. Bernard and Johnny Marr came along to my Düsseldorf studio and I was playing the Kraftwerk tunes that I'd co-written on a piano, and we knew we could work together."

It sounds like a fun period... "I got one of the worst hangovers I've ever had in my life after attending [Pet Shop Boy and Electronic affiliate] Neil Tennant's 40th birthday! When we worked at the Power Station studio in London, Brian May paid a visit wearing very short short-shorts. With his hair, he looked like a flower-fairy! Noel Gallagher turned up once – he and Johnny spoke Mancunian to each other and I couldn't understand a word!"

Talking of collaborations... in your autobiography, *The Sound Of The Machine*, you reveal that Elton John asked to work with Kraftwerk around the time of their 1981 album *Computer World*, and there are reports Michael Jackson also wanted to team up with the band...

"As far as I remember, Michael Jackson wanted to work with us, but he also wanted to buy the master tapes of [Kraftwerk's 1978 album] *The Man-Machine*, which was not possible. What do I think a Kraftwerk collaboration with Elton John would have sounded like? I don't know! Can you imagine "Candle In The Wind" co-composed by Elton and [late Kraftwerk member] Florian [Schneider-Esleben]?!" [Laughs]

Kraftwerk were a major influence on techno, which became a huge scene in Germany. Did you ever visit any of the famous German techno clubs like Tresor or Berghain, and if so what did you think?

CLAUD SMITH, VIA EMAIL

I must say, I never was so much into techno. I think it's good when you are in a club and if you want to dance all night, and you're in a party mood. But it's just one little slice of music, and there's so many slices.

What kind of music do you like listening to nowadays? Any recent tracks on repeat?

CLARISSE QUILINO, VIA EMAIL

I have to confess that since Easter, I'm stuck in the *St Matthew Passion*. I'm a big fan of Bach and I will always listen to Stravinsky or to John Cage. But apart from classical music I will only listen to people I know personally. So I listened to *Fever Dream* by Johnny Marr, because I know him. I will listen to the next New Order record, definitely. But too many people are sending me records all the time! I have to make my decision, I can't listen to everybody.

What can you tell us about your next album?

NATHAN WALLACE, SHREWSBURY

Well, I had in mind to combine a synthetic generated symphonic orchestra with the sound of the environment. For three years I've worked on that and it's going to be finished soon. I'm not into making entertainment music, so you could say it's quasi-experimental. But it has got melodies and harmonies and everything you need to discover this music. ▲

The Manchester-Machine: Johnny Marr and Bernard Sumner of Electronic



3 Which metal band covered Kraftwerk's "The Model" in 1997?

"Rammstein?"

CORRECT. What did you think of it?

"He has a very strange voice! [Karl imitates Rammstein frontman Till Lindemann's growl] It's noisy and comic, but it's not supposed to be comedy; it's a sad story with Rammstein! My heart is more towards New Order!" [Laughs]

After "The Model" tops the UK charts in 1982, you were annoyed at Kraftwerk's reluctance to capitalise on its success... "I wanted to play gigs. After we went on the 1981 world tour, we never played another concert and slept through the 1980s MTV period when electronic stars had major success and hits. We did so many things wrong. We didn't promote *The Man-Machine* in America. If we'd promoted it with the red shirts and robots, it would have been a huge success. But it was swallowed up by *Computer World*, and those two records became one on the tour. I wanted to tour *The Man-Machine* with a metal scaffolding set, where we'd slide down the metal bars like the firefighters in the François Truffaut film *Fahrenheit 451*, but that was thrown away."

4 Which TV show did Kraftwerk make their first UK live appearance on in 1975?

"*Tomorrow's World*."

CORRECT. The BBC's science and technology programme.

"That was a great show, but it's one of those moments where my brain cells fail me, because I can't remember anything about it! It was during our first tour of America where we played over 80 shows, so they all merge into one."

5 Which 2011 Marvel film contains three Nazi characters named after Kraftwerk members?

"*The Big Lebowski*?"

WRONG. Although *The Big Lebowski* does boast a Kraftwerk homage in that a protagonist was in the spoof band Autobahn, with their record *Nagelbett* (Bed Of Nails) being a parody of *The Man-Machine*. The Marvel movie was, in fact, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, which contains the characters Roeder, Hutter, and Schneider, named after Kraftwerk members Klaus Röder, Ralf

Bartos and Flür perform "Autobahn" on *Tomorrow's World*, 1975; (inset) spoof Kraftwerk group Autobahn from *The Big Lebowski*, 1998



Hütter and Florian Schneider.

"Oh! I remember somebody telling me about that, but I haven't seen the movie."

The amount of dog-whistle xenophobia Kraftwerk faced from the British press in the early days is astounding. One Lester Bangs-written article was headlined: "Kraftwerk: The Final Solution To The Music Problem?" Did that shock you? "I think that Lester Bangs article is the best one on Kraftwerk ever, because he came up with the line 'In the end, the machines will play you', which is exactly what Kraftwerk is now. When I was in Kraftwerk, we were playing with the musical box; now Kraftwerk became the musical box. The only thing I disliked about the article was they pictured us in a historical shot of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg and surrounded us with Swastikas, which felt nasty. A picture says more than a thousand words."

6 Kraftwerk's *Computer World* was ranked the second-best album of 1981 by NME. Who beat you to No 1?

"Probably *Trans-Europe Express*? No idea!"

WRONG. You were only pipped to the post by Grace Jones' *Nightclubbing*.

"Please forgive me!" [Laughs]

On that album, you created the drum pattern on the track "Numbers", which formed the basis of "Planet Rock" by Afrika Bambaataa & Soulsonic Force, thus helping to establish hip-hop. How do you feel when the likes of Run-DMC hail Kraftwerk as the "foundation of hip-hop"? "Well, I invented the 'Numbers' beat, and being a rhythmic person, I like the way hip-hop artists deal with rhythm. But to me, rap and hip-hop are like newspapers, and each new song feels like a new edition telling me about what's going on in the black community."

7 Which UK No 1 single did you cover with your project Elektrik Music for NME's famous 1992 Ruby Trax compilation?

"Eddy Grant's 'Baby Come Back'?"

CORRECT.

"We did it quickly and it was so much fun. We couldn't record for laughing! Andy [McCluskey] suggested we should do it, so we had dinner, then recorded this comedy version."

8 In 2015, the world's first Kraftwerk conference took place in which UK city?

"Pfft! Blackpool?"

WRONG. Birmingham.

"I'm not interested in Kraftwerk seminars."

To be fair, you could easily give your own...

"I had a professorship at Berlin University Of The Arts for five years and they wanted me to give a Kraftwerk seminar. It felt like an unresolved story, which was why I wrote the book – to analyse how we went from the Kraftwerk I was in to the digital substitute the band has ended up as. Everybody left the band because nobody wanted to work with the last member [Ralf Hütter], who is now able to buy the brand name. He's only able to talk for Kraftwerk because he has deep pockets."

That money and class difference is apparent throughout your book. Apart from



"It's a sad story": Rammstein with frontman Till Lindemann (far right), 1997

Kraftwerk onstage in the '00s, described by Bartos as "digital substitutes"; (Inset) his 2003 first solo LP



the band's inactivity, you eventually quit over "unfair" financial issues. When Ralf – six years your senior – picks the 22-year-old you up from the Düsseldorf music conservatory where you're studying in his Volkswagen, the first signifier of the wealth gap between your backgrounds is the golf clubs in his boot... "That was the first sign. The wealthy are just on a different planet. The problem was I grew up in a different part of the city but made it to the Robert Schumann Conservatory and studied music and they brought me into their Kling Klang studio. I discovered the act of creation in Kraftwerk was communal effort and joy but the recognition and profit were privatised."

So how did Kraftwerk, in your view, end up a "digital substitute"?

The secret why Kraftwerk's music is so sustainable is that we created music in the analogue universe, on a tape recorder. When the computer came along, the magic was over because we didn't play together any more. We didn't look into each other's eyes. And now we have a digital substitute reproducing. Kraftwerk now is like the ABBA [Voyage] tour – but they forgot to make the avatars!"

Your book also details some fun moments you had in Kraftwerk such as nocturnal group swimming sessions, pretending to be gay to escape Germany's compulsory military service (so you could carry on uninterrupted both in Kraftwerk and

studying music), or the time during one of Kraftwerk's "sound drives" – where you'd test demos in the car – and undercover police mistake you for the terrorist organisation the Red Army Faction. When you reveal you're Kraftwerk, it turns out they're fans of the band – so you give them a tour of your clandestine Kling Klang studio... [Laughs] "It was all fun until I

discovered my partners were not fair. Then I lost the fun of it. It was a long process to realising that, and I didn't know what to do because they were just like my elder brothers. But I felt abused by them. I know it's a strong word, but that's how I feel.

"All I remember about my last gigs with Kraftwerk were that Florian kept kicking a football against the mixing desk. It was a terrible tour and we were tearing apart. I was playing a Synclavier [synthesiser]. You could have bought a Concorde for how much it cost!"

9 What four images adorn the cover of your 2003 solo album Communication?

"A telephone, an aeroplane, a camera and a man walking."

CORRECT.

"It's a storyboard. So the man walking is a reporter and he gets a telephone call from his newspaper to go to a football game of England v Germany and take some pictures, and he travels



by aeroplane. This was the idea and I made a film out of it. I loved making that album and I'm currently working on a third solo record that's been influenced by symphonic orchestra and the sound of the environment."

10 On Saturday Night Live in the 1990s, a slowed-down version of Kraftwerk's "Electric Café" was used as the theme for Sprockets, a German spoof TV series hosted by which comedian?

"No idea! Never heard about it!"

WRONG. It was Mike Myers of Austin Powers/Shrek fame.

Would you ever consider rejoining Kraftwerk for even just a one-off gig?

"Well, Florian has passed away [in 2020] and nobody wanted to work with Ralf Hütter any more. He betrayed my trust so many times. I'd never say never, but if Kraftwerk doesn't change to the world of today, it doesn't make any sense to me. I'm not into nostalgia. You can't just stand there singing 'Computer Love' – Kraftwerk should be asking: 'What happens to the Computer World?' We had the idea that it would become a utopia, but now we're arrived in that 'utopia', we have Mark Zuckerberg sitting in Silicon Valley who is, in my opinion, dangerous for democracy. We live in urgent times, and Kraftwerk should reflect that." ▲

The verdict: 5/10

"Not a bad score!"

The Sound Of The Machine by Karl Bartos is published by Omnibus Press

"IT WAS ALL FUN UNTIL I DISCOVERED MY PARTNERS WERE NOT FAIR"
KARL BARTOS



Hans-Joachim Roedelius (left), Michael Rother and Dieter Moebius in kosmische supergroup Harmonia; (right) Cluster collaborator Brian Eno

Neu! beginnings: Michael Rother (left) and Klaus Dinger split away from the first Kraftwerk lineups



THE TOP 20 KOSMISCHE ALBUMS

20 landmarks on the motorik highway to
the endless horizon. By **JON DALE**

RELECTING on his experiences in Kraftwerk and Neu!, two of the most important of the original krautrock groups, Michael Rother recently articulated the difference between them: “Kraftwerk were always based on concepts, whereas Neu! relied on emotions.” It’s a neat summary of the difference between the rigid, formal music of Kraftwerk – which still allowed for moments of great humanity and beauty – and the freewheeling experimentations that made up the kosmische music recorded by connected groups and artists, such as Neu!, the duo of Rother and Klaus Dinger, whose three albums introduced an entirely new and surprising lexicon to both rock music and the avant-garde.

There was some intermingling in this German scene. Rother and Dinger had both been members of Kraftwerk during the early 1970s, alongside other mysterious figures such as Eberhard Kranemann (later known for his albums as Fritz Müller). Indeed, Kranemann and Uli Trepte of krautrockers Guru Guru themselves appeared in a nascent lineup of Neu!, before Rother and Dinger decided to fly together, as a duo. The music they made, centring around Dinger’s relentless, motorik beat – sometimes called the “Apache beat”, and recognised by Brian Eno as one of the three most important of the 1970s – was remarkable in its capacity to achieve escape velocity through the simplest of motifs.

The relationship between Rother and Dinger was famously fractious, though, and they split after their second album in 1973, reuniting briefly later to record their masterpiece, *Neu! 75*. In the intervening time, Rother relocated to an old house in Forst, where he joined Dieter Moebius and Hans-Joachim Roedelius, then recording together as Cluster, to form a trio,

Harmonia. Roedelius had significant prior form as the co-founder of Berlin’s wildly avant Zodiak Free Arts Lab in the late ’60s, alongside Boris Schaak and Conrad Schnitzler, the latter of whom would join Roedelius and Moebius in their earlier incarnation as Kluster. Schnitzler was also briefly a member of Tangerine Dream, who were almost the default Zodiak house band.

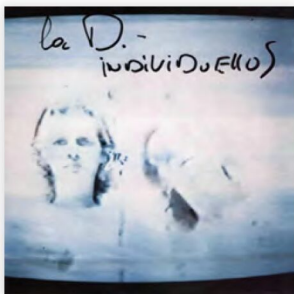
By the time Rother met Moebius and Roedelius, Cluster had already released several albums, and Rother was seduced by one track in particular, Cluster II’s “Im Süden”, a fiercely beautiful piece for spiralling guitar and electronics. Together they’d make sweet music, Rother’s spider-webbing guitar folding around the Cluster duo’s protean, pulsing electronics. Indeed, that was often the core of what would come to be known as kosmische music: drifting, liquid washes of

synthesiser, repetitive pulsations, from rhythm box or drums; filigrees of guitar and piano. Interested in both forward movement and blissful stasis, it’s no surprise that such rich music would go on, in roundabout ways, to inform punk, post-punk, avant-rock, New Age, and electronica.

That expansive influence can be divined, also, in deep love for the Kraftwerk/Neu!/Cluster axis by such artists as Iggy Pop (who recently has been covering Neu!’s “Hero” live), David Bowie (who proposed work with Michael Rother during his Berlin era) and Eno, who recorded several albums with Cluster and Harmonia. You can hear

that influence ricocheting back, too, perhaps via the glam-stomp of Dinger’s post-Neu! group, La Düsseldorf. Hovering over it all is the late, great producer Conny Plank, whose visionary guidance allowed so much of this music to happen. In the end, though, it’s the emotionality that Rother registers – the depth of intensity of kosmische, even when it appears, on first blush, limpid, ambient, floaty – that makes this music so special; that, and its desire to take off to the endless horizon. ▲

**NEU! INTRODUCED
AN ENTIRELY NEW
LEXICON TO BOTH
ROCK MUSIC AND
THE AVANT-GARDE**



20 LA DÜSSELDORF

Individuellos

TELDEC, 1980

Individuellos, the third album by La Düsseldorf, suffers simply for being a consolidation of what Klaus Dinger's second group had already done – chiming one-chord rock; primitive glam stomps; toy-town simple pop melodies. It's still rich with light and laughter though.



19 MICHAEL ROTHER

Katzenmusik

SKY, 1979

On Rother's last solo album with Conny Plank as producer, the guitarist aims for beatific radiance, full of major-key melodies. The pun of the album title ('katzenmusik' means 'racket', but 'katzen' is also a gesture towards Rother's love of cats) is coy but appropriate: these 12 songs share a certain feline grace.



18 CLUSTER

Grosses Wasser

SKY, 1979

This is the most concentrated and stark Cluster's productions had been to that date, with simple pulses brushing up against quietly rippling acoustica. The Steinway piano at the core of *Grosses Wasser* grants the material a regal quality, even when it goes disco-not-disco ("Prothese").



17 CLUSTER

Cluster

PHILIPS, 1971

Losing key member Conrad Schnitzler, and changing from Kluster to Cluster, Moebius and Roedelius invited producer Conny Plank on board for three long explorations of frigid ambience and ruffled drones. You can hear why it was called 'space rock': stars colliding, galaxies forming, etc.



16 ENO, MOEBIUS, ROEDELIOUS

After The Heat

SKY, 1978

Their second collaboration isn't quite as striking as the previous year's *Cluster & Eno*, perhaps owing to how little effort there is in these sweet, gentle 10 pieces. There are a few real gems here, though – see the reversed vocals and guest bass (from Can's Holger Czukay) of "Tzima N'Arki".



15 NEU!

Neu! 2

BRAIN, 1973

Only a group as single-minded as Neu! would run out of money making an album of deluxe minimalist rock. Rother and Dinger's response: clunky, pop-art edits of their only single, "Super"/"Neuschnee". Genius or rip-off? A bit of both, but with gems like "Für Immer", there's two thirds of a classic album here.

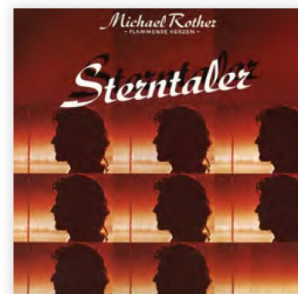


14 CLUSTER

Cluster II

BRAIN, 1972

Moebius and Roedelius are still finding their way on *Cluster II*: moving away from the extended explorations of their first few albums as Kluster, their new music is slowly coming into focus. The six pieces here are star-bound and floating on the astral plane. Dreamscape electronics on space dust.



13 MICHAEL ROTHER

Sterntaler

SKY, 1978

On *Sterntaler*, Michael Rother does more of the same, only more so; he's so completely articulated his own sound, it seems churlish to begrudge him any indulgences. It helps that Rother's simple, folksy guitar melodies float out across Jaki Liebezeit's steady, propulsive drums on this stripped-back gem.



12 CLUSTER & ENO

Cluster & Eno

SKY, 1977

Eno's embrace of electronics made Cluster ideal sparring partners. They returned the favour by appearing on his *Before And After Science*, though this is the better collection: quiescent, toy-like miniatures with hints of tetchy energy.

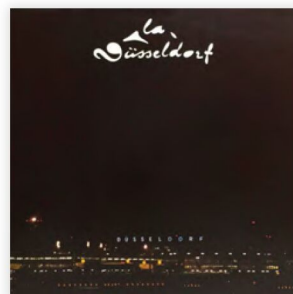


11 THOMAS DINGER

Für Mich

TELEFUNKEN, 1982

Thomas Dinger was a member of La Düsseldorf with elder brother Klaus. After the group fell apart, he relocated to France and made his only solo LP. There are hints of classic Dingerbeat (on "Für Dich"), but the synthscapes and playful meanderings here are Thomas's own.

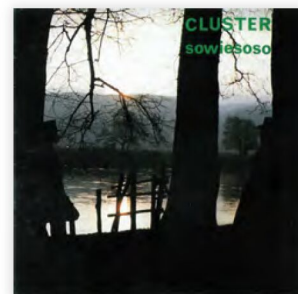


10 LA DÜSSELDORF

La Düsseldorf

NOVA, 1976

Klaus Dinger wrangled himself a hit single out of "Silver Cloud" from the first La Düsseldorf album. The rest of *La Düsseldorf* is variants on that song's seductive monotony, though Dinger's maverick Pop-Art vision for the group meant their mantra-rock was never less than fascinating.



9 CLUSTER

Soweisoso

SKY, 1976

Everything falls into place on *Soweisoso*, a pastoral collection of gently ticking electronics studies. Expanding on the melodic pop of *Zuckerzeit*, Moebius and Roedelius find an inner calm, which makes for an album that's richly moving in its gentleness.



8 HARMONIA Musik Von Harmonia

BRAIN, 1974

The meeting of Neu!'s Michael Rother and Moebius and Roedelius was fortuitous, as Cluster's shift towards miniaturised melody suited Rother's love of intricately woven threads of tone and noise. Here, shuffling rhythm boxes and tender keys dance across slinky guitar strings.



7 LA DÜSSELDORF Viva

STRAND, 1978

Klaus Dinger was always the most genuinely unpredictable artist of the kosmische cabal, even though, in some respects, he only really did one thing repeatedly. But the ways he did it! On *Viva*, Dinger goes glam; the title track is a foot-stomping anthem, while "White Overalls" is so daft it's sublime.



6 MICHAEL ROTHER Flammende Herzen

SKY, 1977

Michael Rother's first run of solo albums find him joined by Jaki Liebezeit of Can on drums, who's a more flexible, improvisatory drummer than Klaus Dinger, though he can play the human metronome, too. The resulting cosmic rock is elegantly focused, lushly melodic.



5 HANS-JOACHIM ROEDELIOUS Durch Die Wüste

SKY, 1978

There's a tightrope walked delicately here, between elegiac ambience and mischievous experimentation; thankfully, the Cluster and Harmonia member never puts a foot wrong, and with pieces like the title track, his music is dewy-eyed and deeply affecting.



4 NEU! Neu! BRAIN, 1972

Neu!'s debut introduced a new sound to rock music – Klaus Dinger's 'Apache beat', coasted by Michael Rother's extended one-note reels for guitar. It's punk-primitive genius, even when most becalmed; when it gets tougher, as with the juddering hypno-rock "Negativland", it births entire bands – that song's a precis of Sonic Youth's career.



3 CLUSTER Zuckerzeit

BRAIN, 1974

On their third album as Cluster, Moebius and Roedelius found they could do pop music, but they made melody bend to their surreal will: elegant melancholy for Roedelius, playful strangeness for Moebius. Songs like "Hollywood" and "Marzipan" are clattering, stub-toed gems, miniaturised explorations of mutant patch bays.



2 HARMONIA Deluxe

BRAIN, 1975

What a meeting of minds: Michael Rother of Neu! joining Dieter Moebius and Hans-Joachim Roedelius of Cluster at their farmhouse in Forst, Germany, for a veritable krautrock super-trio. On their second album, the trio were joined by krautrock eminence grise Uli Trepte of Guru Guru, whose playing unlocked the grids of their music, filled with lush, gorgeous, free-flowing cosmic psychedelia.



1 NEU! Neu! 75

BRAIN, 1975

Two sides of a coin – Rother's pacific chill and Dinger's white-light rock'n'roll burnouts – given one half each of Neu!'s greatest album, one of the defining documents of kosmische and krautrock. "Isi" perfects the duo's star-blinded mantras; flip the record and "Hero" is pure proto-punk wildness, Dinger channelling Detroit rock puritanism as he rails against the music industry: "Fuck the company!"

THE MISCELLANY

The singles, collectables, robot assistants and more.

By **MARK BEAUMONT** and **MARK BENTLEY**

THE SINGLES

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO KRAFTWERK'S RADIO-ACTIVE 45s



KOHOUTEK-KOMETENMELODIE 1973

Consisting of two work-in-progress versions of the "Kometenmelodie" tracks that would dominate Side Two of *Autobahn* the following year, Kraftwerk's debut single was a sketch of a suite, exploring psychedelia and acoustic avenues around the tracks' soon-to-be-familiar themes.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

AUTOBAHN 1974



Chopped from 22 minutes to a far more foot-to-the-floor cut - 3:28 in much of the world, just 3:05 in the UK - Kraftwerk's first international hit ignored all detours and took a shortcut straight to the "Beach Boys" bit, whether in the German or English-language versions.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 11; US 25

KOMETENMELODIE 2 1974



The streamlining of *Autobahn* continued as "Kometenmelodie 2" - named "Comet Melody 2" in the UK - was spliced almost in half for single release. As a result it blazed across the vinyl, but failed to make a deep impact on the charts.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

RADIOACTIVITY 1976



The only single from 1975's *Radio-Activity* set the controls for the heart of the reactor with a three-minute edit of the album version's six-plus, retaining the Morse code while tuning directly into the melody. Curiously, only a Top 10 hit in France.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS 1977



Spending two minutes fewer in motorik sidings and rather racing back to Düsseldorf for tea with Bowie, the single version of "Trans-Europe Express" - again released in English and German - was a chilly four-minute ride.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US 67

SHOWROOM DUMMIES 1977



Enough with the edit hatchet! For the second single from *Trans-Europe Express*, Kraftwerk stood their

ground and released a single version just six seconds shorter than the album one. Crucially, it was also the first single to be released as a French-language version, named "Les Mannequins". Reissued in the UK after the success of "The Model".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 25; US -

THEROBOTS 1978

"Die Roboter" on the German version (which sounds like a line from *Terminator: Krautrock*), the four-minute single edit of *The Man-Machine*'s signature tune maintained the original's core mainframe and was a launchpad for Kraftwerk's android aesthetic.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -



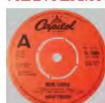
DAS MODEL 1978



Originally "Das Model" was only released as a single in Germany, where it failed to chart. Luckily the band decided it might be worth knocking out an English-language version, which may possibly crop up later.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

NEON LIGHTS 1978



With "Das Model" inexplicably flopping, Kraftwerk presumably thought the UK's record-buying public might dig the same single if they simply reversed the sides, whacked on "Trans-Europe Express" and did it all in English. Check out the "luminous green vinyl" 12".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 53; US -

POCKET CALCULATOR 1981



Their internal translation apps kicking in earnest, the first single from *Computer World* emerged not just in English and German but also French, Japanese and Italian versions.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 39; US 102

COMPUTER LOVE 1981



Is sir absolutely certain he doesn't want "The Model"? In the late '70s they whacked it on the B-side of a Brazilian release of "Spacelab" and an Argentinian version of "Metropolis", even calling it "El Modelo", such was Kraftwerk's dedication to their catwalk classic. And here it is again, tucked onto the B-side of the *Computer World* track that would later provide the root source for Coldplay's "Talk".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 36; US -

NUMBERS 1981



Almost an audio language lesson in counting in a variety of global tongues, "Numbers" was a US, Canada and UK single release backed with "Computer Love".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US 103

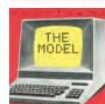


COMPUTERWELT 1981

An uncondensed "Computerwelt" received a variety of single releases globally in 1981, most interestingly a German-only 12" dance remix with added clatter.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK -; US -

THE MODEL 1981



What kept you? Repackaged as a double A-side, the "Computer Love"/"The Model" single hit the UK top spot after DJs finally cottoned on to Kraftwerk's seminal piece of poised pop.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US -

TOUR DE FRANCE 1983



Originally written for the abandoned 'TechnoPop' sessions that were eventually resurrected as *Electric Café*, the many and varied formats and releases of the downhill-glide "Tour De France" single were virtually a one-off remix album in their own right, featuring numerous edits and reworkings of the track in a variety of languages. The definitive version?

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 22; US -

MUSIQUE NON-STOP 1986



You'd have thought by 1986 that Kraftwerk would've stopped writing songs that were two minutes too long for radio, but nonetheless the gig-ending game of vocal Pong that was "Musique Non-Stop" came out in slightly slimline form as the first single from *Electric Café*.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 82; US -

THE TELEPHONE CALL 1987



The only Kraftwerk song sung by Karl Bartos, left hanging stoically on the telephone, the single version of "The Telephone Call" differed only subtly from the *Electric Café* take, and gave Kraftwerk their second No 1 on the Billboard Hot Dance Club Play chart. Impressive!

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 89; US -

THEROBOTS 1991



According to Moore's Law, computers generally double in performance every two years, so 13 years after its first release, "The Robots" got a long-overdue house-era upgrade for *The Mix*, and the UK chart respect it always deserved.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 20; US -

RADIOACTIVITY 1991

Also reimagined for *The Mix*, the new-look "Radioactivity" took on a rave-age depth and complexity, casting Kraftwerk as acid house overseers peering down upon their creation and deciding, "Ja, ist gut."

EXPO 2000 1999

Thirteen years after their last original recording, a 30-second cappella single for the Hanover Expo 2000 – featuring a Kraftwerkian vocoder voice singing the title in English, German, French, Spanish, Russian and Japanese – was worked up into an array of ambient pop mixes and remixes (Orbital; Underground Resistance) for a stand-alone single.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 27; US –

TOUR DE FRANCE 2003 2003

Still cycling, cycling, cycling, cycling down Grand Colombier, it was only natural for the *Tour De France*

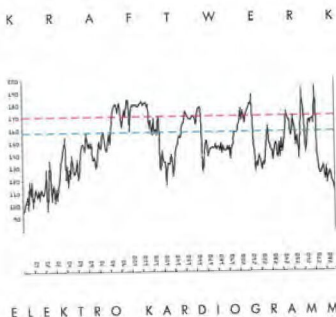
Soundtracks singles campaign to kick off with a sophisticated, harp-laden millennial re-recording of the 1983 original, keeping only the structure of the track intact.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 20; US –

ELEKTRO KARDIOGRAMM 2003

Beneath the breathing, a heartbeat. Really getting inside the experience of the competitive cyclist, in a ribcage sort of way, *Tour De France Soundtracks*' second single was given an limited-edition promo release in a "Radio Edit" form with the obligatory two minutes of non-chorus beat making lopped off.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK –; US –



AERODYNAMIK 2004

A UK Dance Chart No 1 on its initial release in a range of different mixes, the last Kraftwerk single to date – a classic piece of urgent ambience – was also a minor hit when reissued as a remix by Hot Chip in 2007, backed with a new version of "La Forme".

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 33; US –

KLING KLANG COLLECTABLES!

A GUIDE TO KRAFTWERK ON VINYL AND BEYOND

PERHAPS the only way Kraftwerk follows the traditional trajectory of a 'rock' band is in the collectability factor of their records. We mean – quite simply – that earlier releases are higher priced, and most sought after. Likewise, compilations and reissues carry lower values than original albums. But even then, trends are fiendishly bucked.

Exhibit A would

be Ralf, Florian and co's sole album as The Organisation (in full, Organisation Zur Verwirklichung Gemeinsamer Musikkonzepte), from 1970. **TONE**

FLAT was only released on RCA in the UK and was hardly a big seller. A copy in "Very Good Plus" condition today – no rips, stains, cracks, scratches, whatever – would be conservatively valued at £500. That said, there are Near Mint copies listed on Discogs as we speak, carrying tickets from £1,500 up to €2,700. The latter valuation is ambitious, we'd suggest.

The lack of official CD reissues mean that original pressings of the first three albums have long, long been highly prized. German issues of 1 and 2 trend around £70–£100 in excellent condition. In the UK, 2LP anthology **KRAFTWERK** performs the *Doppelschlag* of being a rare and influential set also released on the obscenely collectable Vertigo label. The earlier versions came with a black-and-white swirl on the label – which hypnotises as it spins. Prices for an Excellent copy start around £200, but Near Mint versions will go higher. (Later Vertigo 'spaceship' label versions are more common; £50 should get you that.) Meanwhile, UK issues of the lesser-spotted **RAIF AND FLORIAN** (with gatefold sleeve, and spacecraft label) are worth £100+ in Mint.

As the band moved mainstream – if you can ever call Kraftwerk mainstream – then prices slow down. Original **AUTOBAHN**s hit the barriers at £30, with **RADIO-ACTIVITY** £20. As their *Sgt Pepper*... of sorts, **TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS** carries a premium, £50 in top condition? Thereafter UK

albums almost seem bargain-basement; **ELECTRIC CAFE** at £12 for an original is a steal, and UK hit singles in picture sleeves – "COMPUTER LOVE"/"THE MODEL", say – are still a fiver.

From the mid period, you're looking for special editions, such as the '78 red-vinyl German pressing of **DIE MENSCH MASCHINE** (£600).

For singles, we'd direct you to the **NEON LIGHTS** 12", on luminous vinyl and dayglo sleeve – £30, although

perversely someone paid £750 for a rare black-vinyl pressing in 2015. And among the litany of promos and acetates that always add value, seek out non-European pressings. The Brazilian 7" of "THE ROBOTS" is something of a *helliger Gral* for collectors, at £400+. Official reissues and boxsets are worth having, too: the widely distributed 2004 promo of eight-CD set **THE CATALOGUE** (limited to 1,000 copies) chips in at £120. That's around the same ballpark figure as the 2009 deluxe box **DER KATALOG** and the top-of-the-range Blu-ray edition of live set **3D THE CATALOGUE**.

You can't actually listen to the most (in)famous Kraftwerk collectables. They would be **ORIGINAL TOUR POSTERS** from the 1970s. The first tour carries the highest prices – and £700 seems the going rate for one infamous, undiscoverable design, which the curious can search for on Popsike.com. **MARK BENTLEY**



MISCELLA

THE EARLY MODEL

THE BETA-WERKERS ON THE FRINGES OF KRAFTWERK HISTORY

CLAUS DINGER
Nearly unique among those listed here for actually appearing on a Kraftwerk record (*Kraftwerk 1*'s "Vom Himmel Hoch"), Dinger went on to form the excellent Neu! with Michael Rother.

ANDREAS HOHMANN
Another drummer, Hohmann plays on a couple of great *Kraftwerk 1* numbers: "Ruckzuck" and "Stratovarius".

EBERHARD KRANEMANN
Present very early in the Kraftwerk story, Eberhard collaborated with the young Florian as early as 1967 but was eclipsed when Ralf Hütter came into the picture.

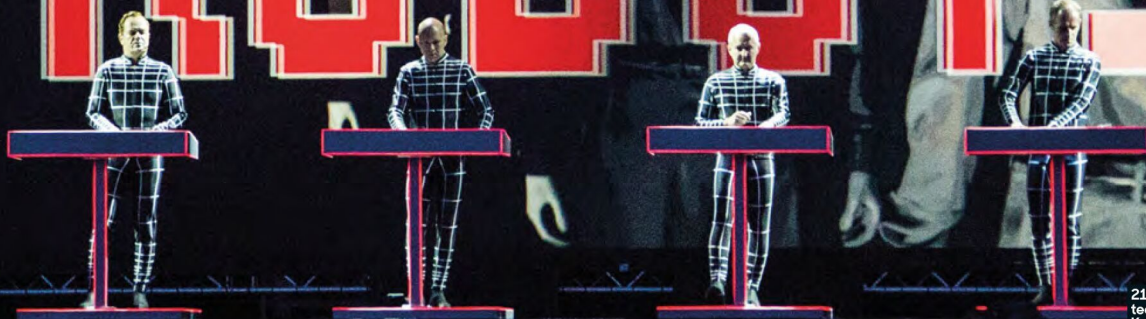
HOUSCHANG NEJADEPOUR
"Düsseldorf's best Jimi Hendrix impersonator" according to Michael Rother, Nejadedpour's bluesy chop was welcome in Kraftwerk's fluid, Ralf-less incarnation of early 1971 but not beyond it. Went on to play with Guru Guru.

MICHAEL ROTHER
A colleague of Wolfgang Flür in Düsseldorf's Spirit Of Sound, the urbane Rother's contribution to Kraftwerk is best heard on the heavy 'Radio Bremen' 71 boot. Afterwards: the driving Neu! and his own lovely glissandi.

PETER A SCHMIDT
Little is known about Peter A Schmidt, but he was a Kraftwerk member in February 1971 – the period, personnel-wise at least, of their greatest rhythmic flux.

CHARLY WEISS
A live drummer of '71, Charly Weiss (born Hans Gunter Weiss in 1939) had been in the Kraftwerk orbit since the days of Organisation. He died in 2009. There's a YouTube video of Eberhard Kranemann playing free sax over his open coffin. **JOHN ROBINSON**

ROBOTS



21st-century technoid men: Kraftwerk at the 2013 Roskilde Festival, Denmark

THE MENSCHES BEHIND THE MASCHINES

WHO'S WHO IN TODAY'S TOURING KRAFTWERK

RALF HÜTTER

The only remaining founding member of Kraftwerk, Hütter has successfully maintained his enigma despite much pressure and probing. "I wake up in the morning, I brush my teeth, I go to the studio, I work, I go back home, I eat, I sleep," he told *The Guardian* in 2009. He also gathers the band for cycling trips at weekends. "It helps with the music," he said in 2017. "You can only go in one direction – always forward. Also, it's about being independent. You use your own forces to go forward."

HENNING SCHMITZ

Kling Klang's sound engineer since 1978, Schmitz stepped up when Fernando Abrantes, who had been brought in as replacement for Karl Bartos in 1991, left the band after a brief engagement. He'd previously studied sound and image technology at the Musikhochschule Rheinland and Fachhochschule Düsseldorf and has created music and sound effects for radio programmes since the mid-'80s. He moonlights from Kraftwerk as a lecturer at the Robert Schumann Institute.

FRITZ HILPERT

Alumnus of Germany's Musikisches Max-Reger-Gymnasium, Hilpert worked as sound engineer for German bands such as new wavers Din A Testbild before starting to work on studio material with Kraftwerk in 1989 and joining the touring lineup in 1990, with the departure of Flür. His first musical contribution was on "Expo 2000" in 1999, and he really came into his own as a co-writer on *Tour De France Soundtracks*. In charge of Kraftwerk's online presence, Hilpert is also central to the sound engineering at Kling Klang.

FALK GRIEFFENHAGEN

Another Kraftwerkian trained in the dark arts of sound and video engineering – as well as jazz piano, flute, saxophone and clarinet – Grieffenhagen worked as a composer, engineer, software developer and lecturer before he appeared on the scene in 2012 as Kraftwerk's live video technician, replacing Stefan Pffafte.

TOP FIVE KRAFTWERK BOOTLEGES

IT'S true, Ralf Hütter would prefer you to only know the official material. An enthusiast, however, might want to explore the many live shows through unofficial channels. These are our pick:



CROYDON 21/09/75

The misty sound quality only adds to the charm of this gentle, enchanting show captured at Fairfield

Halls in the south London suburbs, the electronic melodies as bright as stars on a cold night.



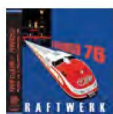
LIVE ON RADIO BREMEN

The Rother/Dinger version of Kraftwerk can be heard in full effect on this 1971 show from June 12 at Bremen's Gondel Filmkunsttheater. It opens (with "Heavy Metal Kids") with the band sounding like Black Sabbath and has a lovely "Ruckzuck", too.



LIVE IN TOKYO 1981

September on the *Computer World* tour, and Kraftwerk take their vision of European technocracy to Japan. A top-quality show, respectful applause very much due, as the band's digital grace bounces around a big hall.



PARADISO, 1976

The band's unifying *TEE* journey is mesmerising rhythmically and conceptually. And evidently

slightly puzzling to an Amsterdam audience, unsure of how to respond (cowboy whoops?). Nice chunk of *Radioactivity*.



LEVERKUSEN, GERMANY, 04/22/74

Opens with a lovely pastoral flute/synth jam, as the band's experimental and electronic incarnations meet and synchronise. A very immersive set: they play "Autobahn" for 41 minutes, which is pretty fun if you packed snacks and drinks.

JOHN ROBINSON



THE SOLO MATERIAL THE WORK OUTSIDE KRAFTWERK

WOLFGANG FLÜR

Author of arguably the world's first android confessional in 2000's *I Was A Robot*, Flür's first releases after leaving Kraftwerk in 1987 were with electronic dance act Yamo, who collaborated with Mouse On Mars for an album called *Time Pie* in 1996 and produced a pumping dancefloor throbber named after his autobiography in 2004. Making extensive reference to Kraftwerk tracks and experiences, *I Was A Robot* was an enjoyably meta treat and, over a decade later, would lead off Flür's only solo album to date, 2015's *Eloquence: Complete Works*, which collected other wise unreleased or obscure solo material and remixes from 2002 onwards. Completists might have been particularly interested in "Cover Girl", Flür's solo sequel to "The Model", and enjoyed his more light-hearted takes on Kraftwerk tropes, such as his song about gymnastics ("On The Beam") and the part where he, very dubbily, burns a cake ("Best Friend's Birthday").

KARL BARTOS

Frustrated at Kraftwerk's slow, perfectionist ethos, Bartos was understandably swift to get to work upon leaving the group. By 1992 he'd remixed Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock" - no doubt to his old bandmate's annoyance, considering their earlier out-of-court wrangles over the song. In 1993, he released his first album with new act *Elektric Music*, *Esperanto*, involving contributions from Lothar Manteuffel of Rheingold, Emil Schult and OMD's Andy McCluskey - and very much in the Kraftwerk vein. 1998 brought a more guitar-driven



follow-up, *Electric Music*, described by Bartos as an "exploration of the sound of the '60s - guitar pop out of the computer" and perhaps inspired by the electro-rock crossover of Electronic's second album *Raise The Pressure*, which Bartos had co-written and played keyboards on in

1996. From 2000's celebrity-baiting single "Fifteen Minutes Off Fame" he began releasing records under his own name - 2003's *Communication* album was his concept statement on electronic media, while 2013's *Off The Record* was a much belated release, recorded before its predecessor. In the meantime, Bartos delved into production, soundtrack work for a 2007 documentary on Jean Girard and developing



Emil Schult's pictures in the *Hyper! A Journey Into Art And Music* exhibition, Hamburg, February 2019



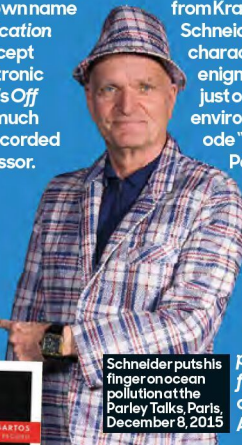
a 2011 music-making app called *Mini-Composer*.

EMIL SCHULT

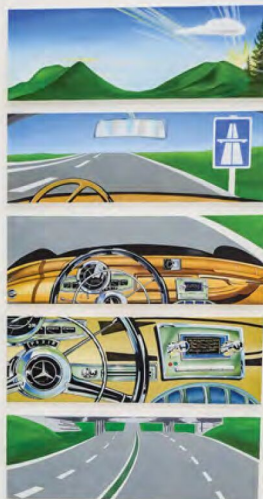
Beyond his work with the band, Kraftwerk's audio-visual collaborator has been very active in art, literature, electronic music, video imagery and academia, but only released one single, 1997's "Elektronisches Mosaic".

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

Following his departure from Kraftwerk in 2008, Schneider remained characteristically enigmatic, releasing just one song, the environmental electronic ode "Stop Plastic Pollution" in 2015. Glitchy and drenched in darkness and synthetic dripping, it featured Florian whispering "stop plastic pollution, save the fish" like a slightly creepy David Attenborough.



Schneider puts his finger on ocean pollution at the Parley Talks, Paris, December 8, 2015



INSIDE KLING KLANG

Well, sort of. What we know about the most mysterious studio in the world

WHERE IS IT?

Originally, beside Düsseldorf's main railway station at Mintropstraße 16. Behind the shutters, beyond an enclosed courtyard, was Kling Klang, Kraftwerk's studio HQ established in 1970 and eventually named after the lead track from *Kraftwerk 2*. To the right of the courtyard, a loading stage used by the electrical installation company upstairs. In the basement, their old equipment and instruments, rooted out if ever needed again. And through an anteroom, with no reception or even a telephone, was the soundproofed 60sqft studio, with siderooms used for constructing home-made oscillators and other custom equipment.

WHO BUILT IT?

There was, reportedly, a very DIY origin to the studio. The initial PA frames were self-built from plywood and cast aluminium, and though it would be the purchase of commercial equipment including the Minimoog, Echolette Tape Echo and EMS Synthi AKS that would direct their sound from *Ralf And Florian* onwards, they continued to create their own instruments and wiring systems until a full-time engineer was employed to assist with designs.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Photos make it look like a sci-fi control deck, all scaffolding, walls full of wires and panels of electronics on trolleys. Here the band would gather

each evening, watch the news, have an ice-cream from a nearby shop, then head to their individual studio stations and, as Flür would later put it, "[make] some Klang. Or Kling. It depended how we felt."

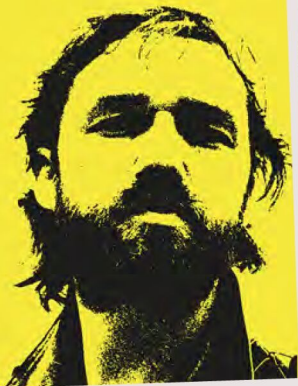
HAS IT CHANGED?

Ahead of the *Computer World* tour, the band set about redesigning



the entire studio so they could easily recreate it on the road. After three years, they had a rig that could be set up and dismantled inside two hours, and Kling Klang could finally go public.

No enigma lasts forever, however, and in 2007 Hütter purchased space in a new development called Mollsfeld, 10km out of the city, where Kraftwerk's business and studio wings could be combined, alongside a rehearsal space. In 2011 they even opened the space up to the public... in a way. The app *Kling Klang Machine No.1* allowed users to "step inside" a virtual Kling Klang and make their own music on the equipment there. Or so rumour has it - if you go looking for it today, it's strangely disappeared...



OUTRO

STOP ME

IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE

Their sometime bassist **EBERHARD KRANEMANN** remembers the dawn of Kraftwerk: revolution, naked swimming and "an artistic sound"

In '68 in Germany there was a student revolution – many students on the street against sick German politics, and I was a part of the cultural revolution. The students on the street threw stones at the policemen but I had the cultural stones in my head.

I made experiments in art with abstract paintings and with very extreme music, something like free jazz but with electric instruments. I had a band called PISSOFF which was very hard music, very loud and powerful. When I played with PISSOFF a young man sometimes came to listen – I didn't know him, his name was Florian Schneider-Esleben. I was a student and he was a pupil at school. He wanted to make music with me... he could feel some new thing happening here.

When he heard me he heard something he'd never heard before. His father was a very famous and rich architect and he had big rooms where we could play music. It was nearby the Rhine, a big house with a swimming pool and lots of things to eat and drink, lots of champagne in the cellar. We often had big parties in this house, in the swimming pool naked with wonderful girls.

This was the beginning of Kraftwerk. In the beginning we worked with real instruments, not electronics, usually electric instruments. I played a violin-guitar, a four-string electric guitar, and we made experiments with Florian to try some new sounds, it was very experimental. It was not so loud, it was an artistic sound.

A year later Ralf Hütter came to the band and he played wonderful Hammond organ. In around '67 or '68, playing very experimental music, it was not possible to earn money so we played some jazz clubs. One night we played at the most famous jazz club in Düsseldorf on the same night that Jimmy Smith – the most important Hammond organ player at the time – had a concert in Düsseldorf. Jimmy Smith came in with his guitar player and he was angry about Ralf Hütter because he played the organ the same way as Jimmy Smith. For the first two or three years Ralf played Hammond organ like a jazz organ. One time he thought, 'What am I doing? I'm playing jazz like people have been doing for 50 years, I must do some new things.' So he changed the style and played more freely, with not so much percussion in it, and it slowly changed into another region of music.

We played together every day, even at weekends. Then suddenly they said, "This weekend we won't play together, we'll meet again on Monday." Later I found out they were in the studio, making the first Kraftwerk album without me, only those two. That was typical Ralf and Florian because they're

egotistic, and if it was possible to earn some money they wanted to do it only for themselves. There was one piece on one of the first records where Florian plays steel guitar, and he stole this idea from me; I was the one in the band who played steel guitar. I played it for two or three years in the band then they go into a studio and play my instrument in my style. That was very bad. You cannot do this with a friend.

THERE was an interesting time in 1970 and '71 when Ralf Hütter left the band because his father did not like that his son made music. He said, "This is shit, you must

earn money, you must have a real profession, you must become an architect." So he studied architecture in Aachen and Florian, Charly Weiss and me were the only band members of Kraftwerk for two years. One day Florian wanted to change the drum style – Charly Weiss was a free-jazz drummer, very free and wild. Florian wanted a straight, strong structure, so he asked me, "Do you know this Klaus Dinger? Can we try to play with him?" We played with him, and Klaus said, "I'd like to bring another friend into the band", which was Michael Rother. We had a very good concert with five people; this was the most important concert of the early times, in 1970 or '71 in Leverkusen, a big hall, very crowded, more people in this hall than was allowed. We'd play "Ruckzuck" and other

compositions, most of them by Florian, some by me and some we made together. That was the beginning of the other kind of music.

I stopped touring with Kraftwerk in 1971. I played for five years with Kraftwerk and I did not earn money really. When we played, there were 30 or 40 people coming to our concerts and we'd each get maybe 50 Deutsche Mark and you need this for driving the car and drinking and eating. After five years I began to work at the Schauspielhaus theatre as a double bass player because I got 3,000DM. So I leave and Florian took Klaus Dinger and Michael Rother into Kraftwerk to try to do a

new thing, a trio, but it was only for three months. Afterwards Florian told me he was struggling with Michael Rother all the time, they didn't come together with what they played, they had different ideas.

They went to a record company in Hamburg and a studio to make a new album but they stopped it, it did not work, so it came to an end after three months and Ralf came back to Kraftwerk. He had finished his examinations and he didn't want to become an architect, he wanted to make music again. A new, deeper friendship

between Florian and Ralf developed, very intense. For the next 10 or 20 years only Florian and Ralf worked in the studio in Düsseldorf for 12 or 14 hours every day. They did not want to see anyone else, it was like they were married. ▲

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WHEN WE
PLAYED, THERE
WERE 30 OR
40 PEOPLE
COMING TO OUR
CONCERTS



in
CREANCHESSE
03

2. Weihnachtstag 26. 12. 1970 16.00 - 22.00 h Düsseldorf Neubrückstr.

Florian Schneider-Esleben
Eberhard Kranemann
Charly Weiss

Flöte
Bass, Cello, Harmonika
Schlagzeug

KRAFTWERK

The expanded, deluxe *Ultimate Music Guide* to Kraftwerk. As the band prepare to tour Europe, we salute their peerless electronic catalogue with in-depth reviews and selections from our archive of wry and revealing interviews. “Wir fahren, fahren, fahren auf der Autobahn...”



KRAFTWERK

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